

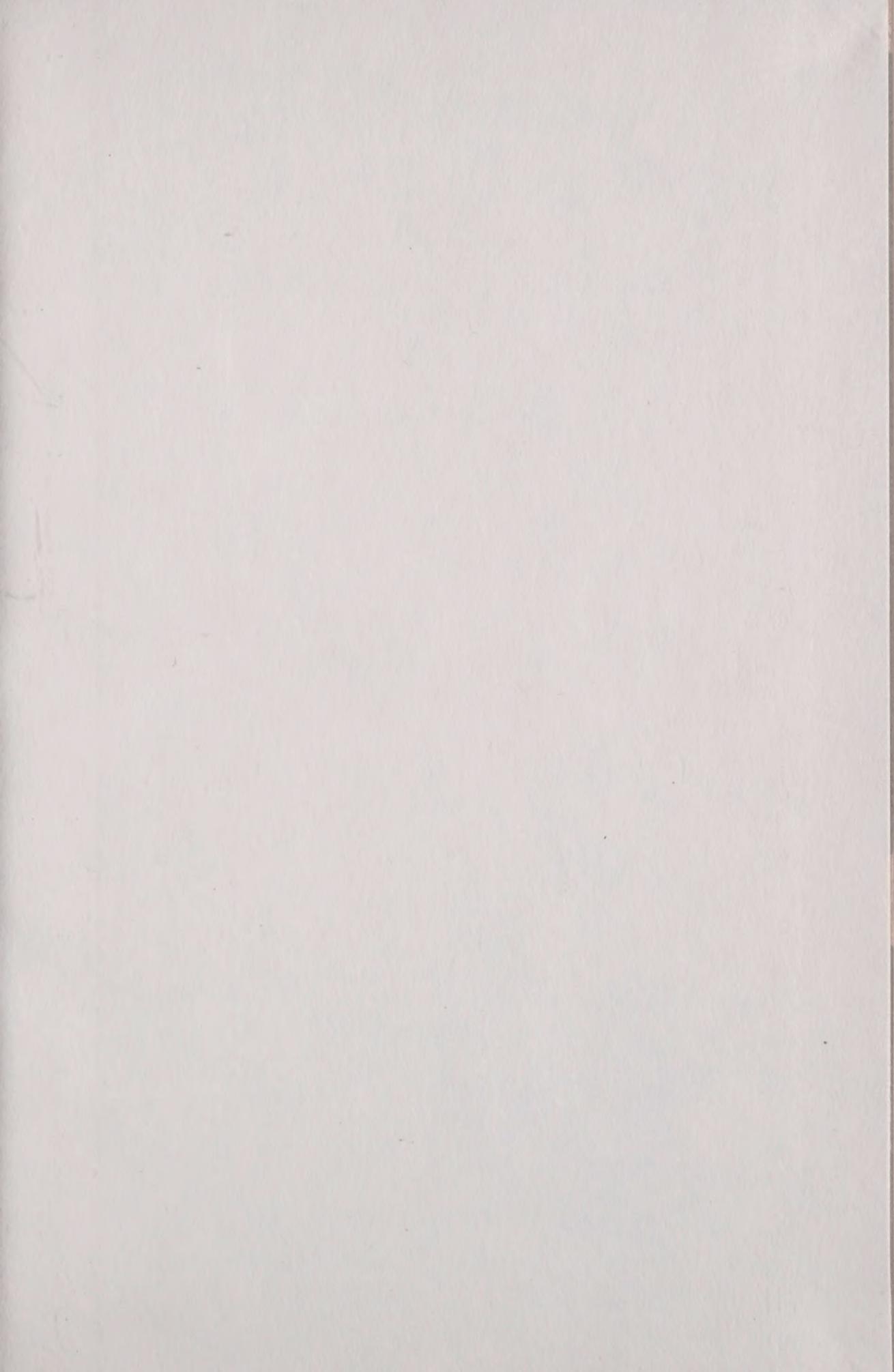
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BETWEEN TWO LOVES

A Tale of the West Riding

BY

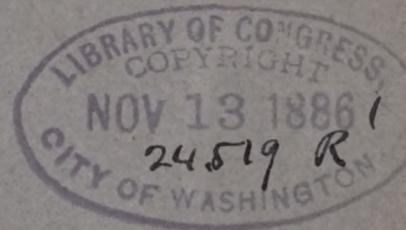
AMELIA E. BARR

AUTHOR OF "THE LAST OF THE MACALLISTERS" ETC.

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BETWEEN TWO LOVES.

CHAPTER I.

LOVER OR BROTHER?

“With cylinder and beam,
And fine conducting skill,
Torture the straitened steam
To work thy reasoned will.

“Then, 'mid thy workshop's dusty din,
Where Titan steam hath sway,
Croon to thyself a song within,
Or pour the lusty lay.”

PROF. BLACKIE.

“Their love in early infancy began,
And rose as childhood ripened into man.”

SUCCESS is the one thing forever good—that success which is the reward of the self-helpful and the persevering ; and standing in Burley Mill, Jonathan Burley was not inclined to underrate either his own merits or the reward they had brought him. The “clickity-clackity ! clickity-clackity !” of the looms, the “whirr-r-r-ing” of the belts and drums, and the “hum-m-m-ing” of the great engine in the regions below, were the noblest of music in his ears. For Burley was proud of his mill, and rather inclined to consider it as the veritable and final cause of sheep and iron. Were there not men on Australian plains, and Tartar steppes, and American prairies, and English hill-sides, whose sole care was the wool which supplied his constantly craving machines ?

The dusty daylight was loaded with a thousand subtle odors of oil and wool and dyes; and the sunshine fell upon hundreds of webs, many-colored and bright-tinted, soft and glossy as silk, beautiful with curious devices and borders and reliefs. It fell also upon hundreds of "hands," some of them ordinary enough, slipshod both as to mind and body; others bright, handsome, alert, and full of intelligence. The best workers, almost without exception, were women—rosy-cheeked Yorkshire girls—or the more intellectual Lancashire "hand," with her wonderful gray eyes, long-fringed, bewitching, and full of feeling. The men had less individuality, and the long, blue checked pinafore and cloth cap, which all alike wore, still further increased their uniformity.

Each worker attended to two looms, and most of them were singing as they watched the shuttles glide swiftly between the webs, and the wefts slowly welding themselves to the warps, and growing into soft merinos and lustrous alpacas. Burley, standing within the door of the long weaving-room, saw everything with a comprehensive eye. He was fond of singing, and he listened with pleasure to the clear, throstle-like warbling of a girl in some solo part, and the stirring chorus lifted by twenty voices around her. It was a favorite hymn of his, and it touched him somewhat; he had no objection to hear its triumphant strains mingling with the clicking of the machinery and the clack of the wayward shuttles; he knew well that men and women who sing at their labor put a good heart into it.

Nature has made many fine fellows in her time, and she meant Jonathan Burley for one of them. He had a grand physique, good mental abilities, and a spiritual nature of quick and lofty sympathies. But when the passion of fortune-making gets hold of a man, it robs, in greater or less degree, all his faculties. So, though the hymn touched some sentiment far nobler than wool, it was wool that was in all his thoughts as his eyes wandered down the long room.

He had his hands in his pockets; but the attitude did not give him that air of indolent unconcern it gives to many men;

an observer would have been quite sure that he was only fingering his gold as a stimulus to some calculation of profit and loss. It was strange that the process should have been going on even while he noted each loom, and let the melody of the hymn sink into his consciousness; but it was, and Ben Holden, his chief overseer, when he entered knew it.

“Burley, thou hed better close wi’ Dixon for them yarns afore he lets them go to somebody else.”

“He’s welcome to let them go to anybody but me, at that figure.”

“If thou hed thy wits about thee thou would take ‘em.”

“Ben, thou doesn’t know iverything. It might be wit to take ‘em, but it will be wisdom to let ‘em alone. It’s a varry queer thing thou will meddle i’ my affairs;” but even while uttering the half complaint, he put his hand on Ben’s shoulder and went out with him. They stood on the stone steps a few minutes talking very earnestly, the overlooker, in his long, checked pinafore and cloth cap, making a strong contrast to the master in handsome broadcloth and fine linen. And the subject of their conversation was singular, considering the place and business relations of the two men.

“Burley,” said Ben Holden, “thou hesn’t been to thy class-meeting in five weeks.”

“And I’ll not be there to-night, Ben.”

“My word! but God hes a deal to do wi’ some folks before he can get ‘em to do right.”

“Why, thou knows I’m a bit bothered about my daughter Eleanor and Anthony Aske. They don’t get on as well as might be, and I’m none going to fetch my family troubles to t’ class-meeting. Not I.”

“Nay, I niver heard tell of it before. It sounds varry like uncommon nonsense. Eleanor’s nobbut a child; it’s a queer thing if Aske is letting her dispute with him already.”

“Ben, thou art a bachelor. Little thou knows of women; and there’s no use in telling thee how they do manage men in these days. St. Paul himself would niver hev believed it, niver!”

Then Burley walked away. There had been no profession of friendship, no ceremony at parting, but the whole tone and attitude of the two men towards each other indicated a sincere affection and perfect confidence. For the inequality between them was more artificial than real. Both had been born in the same small moor-side village, and they had shared together their boyish griefs and joys. Both had begun life in the same mill. Burley had married a rich wife, made money, and became a large mill-owner and a wealthy man. Holden had enough and to spare; and if he had not been as successful in business he had given his spare time to study, and become a favorite local preacher and class-leader. So, if Burley was master in the mill, Holden was in higher things the master's teacher. Each in his capacity spoke plain words to the other, but their mutual attachment was as true and warm as in the days when they had trudged hand in hand to hard work, and shared their scanty meals.

The mention of his daughter's name changed the whole expression of Jonathan's face, and as he climbed the steps to an upper weaving-room it grew dark with anger.

"Let him, if he dares," he muttered; "he'll hev more than a lass to fight with if he does." Then he opened a door, and looked down the rows of ponderous Jacquard looms with their dangling yellow "harness," and their silent, patient weavers. One loom was not working, but at another, not far from it, a very handsome woman was busily engaged. She did not look up as Jonathan entered, but she was aware of his entrance, and her face flushed as he approached her. For a moment he watched the different threads of the "harness" rising and falling as if to a tune; then he said, softly, "Thy brother is away again, Sarah; now what wilt thou do about it?"

"I can't tell, master, till t' time comes, then I'll do my duty, whatever it may be. Hev patience a bit longer wi' him."

"Then it's for thy sake, I can tell thee that." She made a slight negative motion of her head, and bent her face resolutely over the leaves and flowers growing with every motion of the shuttle.

Jonathan then paused at the empty loom. The work in progress was of a beautiful and intricate design, and evidently the labor of a master-hand. He admired it heartily, and catching Sarah's glance watching him, he nodded back to her his approval of it. As he left the room he looked once more at her, and most men would have done the same. Not, perhaps, because of the perfect oval of her face, or of the charm of her large, lustrous gray eyes; but because such a loving, noble soul looked forth from them that one forgot whether the body was there or not.

There was an old tie between Sarah Benson and her master—one which she probably knew nothing of. But Jonathan remembered that he had loved the girl's mother, that he had carried her dinner-can, and gone with her to chapel, and tended the looms next hers, for two happy years. And he knew now that Sarah was very dear to him, though he had never suspected the love until it had become a part of his daily life and dearest hopes.

For when Sarah first entered his mill she was only a child ten years old, and many changes had taken place since. Jonathan, then on the road to fortune, had achieved success, and the only child that his wife left him had been recently married to Anthony Aske, the young squire of Aske Hall, and one of the richest landed proprietors in the county. Her fortune and future were provided for, and Jonathan, yet in the prime of life, a handsome man whose career was assured, hoped now to realize with the woman he loved the domestic happiness which had been his dream thirty years before.

But in all our hopes there is generally some "why" or "if." Sarah did not look at life through the same eyes as Jonathan. She loved with her whole soul a brother, who relied upon her almost as he would have relied upon a mother. And this youth had just those qualities which attach women with passionate strength to their possessor. Handsome, gay, full of beautiful, impossible dreams, quite dependent upon her care and forethought for every daily comfort, she yet loved him all the better for his faults and his weakness.

True, when he chose to work, few workmen could compete with Steve Benson. The loveliest designs grew under his fingers, and he had an equal facility in their execution. But he hated any employment which "chopped his days into hours and minutes," and above all things he hated the confinement and noise and smell of the mill.

The trouble with Steve was one which ruins many a promising life. Nature had made him to live with her, and to do his life's duty in some of her free, open-air workshops; and ignorance and untoward circumstances had tethered him to a Jacquard loom in a noisy mill. Sarah dimly understood something of this mistake; but thirty years ago women were not accustomed to analyze life and its conditions. They took it as it came, and thought it enough to follow their catechism and "do their duty in that state of life into which it hath pleased God to call them."

At six o'clock Sarah had reached the little cottage which she called "home." It consisted only of three rooms, one down-stairs and two smaller ones above it; but it was beautifully clean and very well furnished. The flag floor was as white as water and pipe-clay could make it; the steel fender shone and glinted in the pleasant blaze of the fire; there was a home-made hearth-rug, large and thick and many-colored, before it; and a little round table set with cups and saucers of a gay pattern; the kettle simmered upon the hob, and Sarah was kneeling before the fire toasting some slices of bread, when the door opened, and a laughing, handsome, dusty fellow entered.

"My word, Sarah! but I am tired and thirsty and hungry. Eh, lass! but I've hed such a jolly tramp of it."

"Wheriver hes thou been, my lad? Burley was rare put out to find thy loom idle."

The last word was broken in two by a kiss, and ere Steve let her face slip from his hands he stroked affectionately the smooth bands of black hair above it.

"Been? Why, I've been all through Elsham woods, and down to t' varry sea-sands; and look 'ee here, my lass!" Then

he emptied his pockets on the rug beside her—shells and insects and weeds, and all sorts of curious things.

She could not say a cross word to him—he looked so happy, so perfectly satisfied with his day's doings. He passed over her remark about his loom as if it was a subject not worth speaking about, and began a vivid description of all he had seen and heard. She brought him a basin of water and soap, and a towel, and while he spattered and splashed, he was telling her, in interrupted sentences and with broken laughs, all his adventures.

“There is no tea like thine, Sarah, and no toast either, dear lass;” and when he had drained the pot and emptied the plate, she made him more, and still listened, with apparent interest, to his talk, though her thoughts towards the end of the meal were wandering far from Elsham woods and the sea-side. After it was over and the house-place tidied, she went to her room to consult with her own heart. What was to be done with this loving, charming lad, who could neglect his work, and spend a whole day gathering shells and weeds, seemingly quite unconscious that he was doing wrong? She had allowed Steve to pursue his own way so long, and yet she was aware that it contained elements of disaster which at some time would be beyond control.

This night, in spite of her apparent content, a question she had long put aside presented itself peremptorily for answer. “This road” or “that road,” which was it to be? She did not distrust her own judgment, and she was a woman who, amid many counsellors, would be very likely to follow her own judgment; yet she wanted some one to advise her to do what she had already determined on.

She put on her best dress and bonnet and went down-stairs. Steve was sitting in the chimney-corner, serenely smoking a long clay pipe. On the table at his elbow there was a jar of tobacco, his violin, and his specimens. His face beamed with the luxury of anticipated pleasure, yet as soon as he saw that Sarah was going out he said, “Wait a bit, Sarah; I'm none too tired to walk wi' thee.”

"Nay, I won't hev thee, Steve. I'm going by mysen to-night, lad."

His nature was too easy and careless to ask "Where?" He laid down his pipe and took up his violin, and as she went up the street, she heard him playing "The Bonnie House o' Airlie." In some subtle way the strains made an unpleasant impression on her, and she walked rapidly onward, never stopping until she reached a quarter of the town where there were no mills, but many squares and terraces of comfortable houses. She unfastened the gate of one set in a small garden, and went in. The main path was lined with hollyhocks of every color, and as she lingered to admire them, the front door opened, and an old lady called her.

"Sarah Benson, I saw you coming. Walk in."

"Nay; but I was going round, Mrs. Allison. Is t' preacher in?"

"Yes, he is in. There is nothing wrong, I hope, Sarah?"

"Nay, I hope not. I want to tell him summat, that's all."

"Well, then, he is in his study. Go to him."

It was not quite so easy to tell the preacher her trouble as she had thought it would be. She hesitated so much that he said, "Sarah, you must be candid with me. I can't advise you upon half-lights. What is wrong with Steve?"

"He won't stick to his loom, sir, and he's that fond o' rambling about t' country-side that he might as well hev no home at all, and I'm feared Master Burley will lose patience wi' him and turn him off, and there's no telling then what will be to do."

"Well, Sarah?"

"The master, sir, he likes me, and he has spoken words that I might listen to if I knew what to do about Steve."

"Do you mean me to understand that Jonathan Burley has asked you to marry him?"

"To be sure I mean that. I am a decent lass, sir, and he would say no wrong word to me."

"You would be a very rich woman, Sarah, and could do a deal of good."

"But not to Steve; there is no love between Steve and Burley. If I married Burley, Steve would go, and I know not where to. He would niver have bite, nor sup, nor day's work from him; and Burley would fret none if he thought I was rid o' the charge o' Steve!"

"And you think Steve needs you? Is that it?"

"I'm sure that Steve needs me. There's nobody loves him but me. I keep a home for him to come to when he's tired out; and if I didn't listen to his fiddling, and his tales o' all he's seen and read, why he'd varry soon find public-houses where he and his fiddle would be more than welcome. I'm sure o' that, sir."

"You are very likely right, Sarah. Now, do you love Jonathan Burley?"

"Nay, I think not. I know nothing about love; but it seems to me I hev no heart for any one but Steve."

"Then if you are the good girl I take you to be, Sarah, you will not marry a man you do not love, and you will stand by a brother you do love just as long as he needs your help to keep him out of sin and danger. Steve is not a bad lad; the things he likes are good things if he does not neglect his duty for them. Go home and do the best you can to keep him right."

"Thank you, sir; I will do that for sure, I will."

As she went home, she bought a slice of ham for Steve's supper; and as he ate it, she talked to him of his rambles and his specimens until he was in his very happiest humor. Then she told him how Burley had admired his work, and somehow made him feel that it would not be very hard to go back to it in the morning.

"And, Steve," she added, "suppose thee and me join t' building society, and buy our own cottage. Then thou could hev a bit o' garden and grow all t' flowers in it thou likes best. If thou will only stick to thy loom, it will be varry easy work, lad, and I'm sure there will be no one as will hev a finer garden than thee."

This idea charmed Steve. He declared he would work every

day, he would work over-hours for it; and in the glow of this new hope he went to bed. Sarah, also, was full of rest and confidence, and as she went about her common household tasks, Steve heard her cheerfully singing,

“O Lord, how happy is the time,
When in thy love I rest;
When from my weariness I climb,
E’en to thy tender breast.

“And, anywhere or everywhere,
So that I do thy will,
And do my life’s work heartily,
I shall be happy still.”

For, after all, there was in Sarah’s heart a sense of disappointment, and a consciousness of resignation to some duty, which she had set before her own interest and pleasure. She had said, truly enough, that Steve was dearest of all to her; and yet, if—if—she would not think of the “ifs” at all; still, no woman, perhaps, ever resigned the prospect of wealth, honor, and a true affection without some lingering looks backward.

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF STRIFE.

“Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love.”

“O woman! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made.”

“Like as a father pitieth his children.”

“JONATHAN, dost ta understand what I want thee to do to-night?”

“Thou made it plain enough for an infant-school. Thou wants me to come to the class-meeting, and I tell thee I can’t do it.”

“Thou hes been as unrestful as a shuttle in t’ sheath lately. Whatever is the matter, then?”

“I may tell thee that I hev heard Aske isn’t as kind to my daughter as he ought to be, and I’m bound to find out whether he’s doing right by her or not.”

“Stay at home and t’ news will find thee. I niver knew any good come o’ melling between a man and his wife. Women take a deal o’ training, Jonathan. You can’t make a good wife by putting a gold ring on her finger, any more than you can make a good joiner by buying him a box of tools.”

“I’d speak about something I understood, if I was thee, Ben Holden. Women are a bit beyond thee.”

Jonathan was standing by his harnessed gig as he talked; and as soon as he had given his friend this bit of advice, he drove out of the big gates and took the straight road to his

home. There were few rich men in the county who had a more beautiful home. Burley House was no spick-and-span new dwelling, gorgeous with paint and gilding and gay upholstery. It was a fine pile of solid stone, that had been a favorite residence of the Somers family for centuries. It stood in the midst of a wooded park, and before it was a fair, old-fashioned garden, smelling of all the scents of Paradise. When Jonathan bought the place, people expected that he would be proud to continue the old name, and to call himself Burley of Somers Court. But he had rather resented the expectation. "It is not Somers Court now," he said; "it belongs to me, and it is Burley House for the future. The Somers have been wasters, and drinkers, and dicers, and I won't call my home after their name. Why should I?"

He drove rapidly until he entered the park; then he walked the horse under the great elms, and let his thoughts wander back to the village—back to the beautiful woman who had become so dear to his heart. The brooding darkness on his brow cleared as he remembered the light and peace of Sarah's face; and when he lifted his eyes to his many-windowed, stately home, he thought of her as its mistress, and felt that his life without the hope would be a very sombre one indeed.

As he entered the door his daughter came slowly forward to meet him. She was an exceedingly lovely woman; tall, radiantly fair, exquisitely formed, and with a swaying, easy grace in all her movements that was very attractive. She had on a long, flowing dress of violet satin, and many ornaments of gleaming gold. As she walked slowly down the dim hall, the amber light of its stained windows falling all over her, she made a picture so fair that Jonathan paused to look at her. His heart was swelling with affection and pride as he took her hands and stooped forward to kiss her lifted face.

But he saw trouble in it, even with his first glance; and as soon as they were in the closed parlor she began to complain of her husband's indifference and tyranny. "You are father and mother both," she sobbed, with her arms around his neck;

and what father under such circumstances would not have been inclined to espouse his child's quarrel? Yet he knew something of Eleanor's temper, and he knew the world well enough to counsel submission and to discourage any positive act of rebellion.

"I am thy father, Eleanor," he said, tenderly—"I am thy father, and I'll take thy part as far as iver I can, my dear; but listen to me: the world will go with thy husband—right or wrong, it will go with him—if thou takes one step it thinks thou ought not to take. It is a varry hard world on wives, sometimes. Doesn't ta think that thou may hev been a bit wrong, too?"

"Father, I am not going to be ordered about as if I was a slave, bought with his money—"

"Nay, nay, my lass. He got fifty thousand pounds with thee. If it comes to money, we can put down more brass than he can—ay, than he can. But thou art his wife, Eleanor, and thou must try and get thy happiness out of him. And thou won't get happiness out of Anthony Aske by fighting him. If iver thou means to be a woman, thy first and hardest battles must be with thyself."

"I thought he loved me better than everything. He said so often; and now love seems to be quite forgotten."

"He loves thee, I am sure of that; but men hev many a thing to think of. Don't thee set too much store on love, or expect more happiness from it than iver it gives either to men or women."

"He has such a wilful, do-as-I-tell-you temper, father; and you know I have not been used to call any man lord or master."

"Sarah called Abraham lord."

"Sarah had a great many faults, and that was one of the worst of them. I am not going to imitate Sarah. Besides, Sarah would not think of doing such a thing if she lived in England in the nineteenth century."

"Well, well, Eleanor, it's a wife's place to submit a bit. A high temper in a woman doesn't do varry much harm if she's

an old maid; but if she hes a husband it's a different thing. Go home and do thy duty, and—”

“I always do my duty, father.”

“Then do more than thy duty. It's a poor wife that stops at duty, and measures her life by that rule. Give love and patience and something higher still—self-forgetfulness. Anthony Aske isn't a bad sort, but he'll pay thee in thy own coin; most men do that. Nay, nay, my dear lass, don't thee cry, now!”

For Eleanor had hid her face in the satin cushion of the sofa on which she sat, and was weeping bitterly, and Jonathan's heart was hot and angry within him, as he moodily paced up and down the splendid room. He longed to comfort his child—to comfort her whether she deserved comfort or not; and he felt as if there would be a solid gratification in some unequivocal abuse of Anthony Aske. For it was hardly likely that Eleanor was altogether in the wrong; and she was so young, so beautiful and inexperienced, that the father thought, naturally, allowances of many kinds ought to be readily made for her.

Upon the whole it was a very sorrowful conference, and Jonathan's heart ached when he folded the rich carriage robes about his unhappy, angry daughter, and watched her drive away through the evening shadows to her own home. He sat thinking and smoking until very late, full of uncertainty and annoyance. He felt as if Squire Aske had deceived him, and that was a wrong hard to forgive. As a lover he had been so attentive and affectionate. No service had then appeared too great. He had been at Eleanor's side constantly, and ever on the alert to gratify her slightest wish. All who knew the young couple had regarded the marriage as particularly suitable, full of the promise of happiness.

But Aske was an English squire of the old order, and he held in the main their ideas about women. They were to be faithful and obedient wives, careful, busy mistresses, and loving mothers of children. Eleanor's efforts to establish an autocracy of her own at Aske Hall, to rule it as she had done her father's

house, to fill it with company of her own selecting, and order its life according to her social tastes and ideas, were resisted by Anthony from the beginning.

At first his opposition was pleasantly expressed. "She might queen it over him, but he would be her deputy over the household; and as for filling the hall with company, he was jealous of her society, and would not share it with a crowd of foolish men and women." In such flattering words he veiled his authority, for he was deeply in love with his beautiful bride, although he would not surrender to her the smallest of his privileges as her husband and as master of Aske Manor and Hall. Indeed, even in the first days of their married life many things had shared his heart with her—his estate, his horses and dogs, and hunting affairs, county matters and politics.

And Eleanor, undisciplined and inexperienced, could not accept this divided homage. Her father had always given in to her desires and humored all her wishes. Her teachers had found it profitable never to contradict her. Her servants had obeyed her implicitly. Her beauty, youth, and wealth had made her for a time a kind of social queen. Was she to sink into the mistress of Aske Hall, and the wife of Squire Anthony? Surely she ought to rule, at least, the little world around it, just as she had ruled the little world of which Burley House was the centre.

But the main circumstance of the two small worlds were widely different. Jonathan Burley was an autocrat in his mill, and that power satisfied his ambition. He was very willing to resign all domestic power to the women who had charge of his home. On the contrary, Aske had no such outlet. His fine hall, his staff of servants, his farmers and tenants, were his business in life. He would not resign any of his authority over them. Eleanor soon found that if her orders agreed with the squire's they were attended to; if not, her husband set them absolutely aside.

She tried anger, sulking, tears; but if her way was not her husband's way, she never succeeded in getting it. Squire An-

thony was not a man who would give in to an unreasonable woman ; and whenever Eleanor's desires did not agree with his desires, he considered her unreasonable. In half a year a definite point had been reached. The squire announced his intentions ; if his wife approved them he was glad ; if not, he followed them out, quite regardless of any opposition she might offer.

Here was a domestic element full of unhappiness, possibly full of tragedy. Jonathan sat through the long night hours, wakeful, anxious, and sorrowful. He was glad when morning came, and brought with it the open mill, and the mails, and the buyers and sellers. Yet in the fever and turmoil of business he was conscious of an aching, fretful pain, that would assert itself above all considerations about "yarns" and "pieces." His daughter's face haunted his memory. He was angry at Aske, and yet he did not wish to quarrel with him. He had a conviction that it would be like the letting out of water—nobody could tell how far it would go, or in what way it would end.

Early in the afternoon, when business had slacked a little, Burley was standing at the dusty window in his counting-room, looking into the mill-yard. The yard was full of big lorries, which giants in fustian and corduroy were busily loading. Usually, under such circumstances, he would have been mentally checking off the goods and commenting upon them ; but at that hour, though his eyes followed every bale or box, he was not thinking of their contents. But as Ben Holden entered the room, he turned slowly, and said, "Sagar is a brute to his beasts, Ben ; I'll not hev good cattle sworn at and struck for nothing in my yard ; thou tell him I said so."

"Ay, I will. He's a big bully. If t' poor brutes could talk back to him, he'd treat 'em better. He's got a mite of a woman for a wife ; but, my word ! he daren't oppen his lips to her."

"Howiver does she manage him ? I'd like to know."

"Why, thou sees, she's got some brains ; and Sagar, he's only so many pounds avoirdupois of flesh and blood. It's mind

ruling matter, that's all. Thou doesn't look like thysen to-day. Is there anything wrong with thee?"

"There is summat varry wrong; I can tell thee that."

"Is it owt I can help thee in?"

"Thou hes helped me through many a trouble, Ben; but this one is a bit above thy help. It is about my daughter. She and Aske hev got to plain up-and-down quarrelling; and she came with her sorrow to me last night. My poor lass! She has no mother, thou sees, and, as she said, I hev to be father and mother both."

"What was it about then?"

"Well, thou sees, he told her he was going to meet the Townton hounds, and he said to her, 'Put on your habit and hev a gallop; it will do you good.' Now, Eleanor wanted to go, but, woman-like, she would not admit it; she looked to be coaxed a bit, happen, but he answered, 'Varry well, she could do as she liked; he would go for his cousin Jane.' Then t' poor lass cried a bit, and he whistled, and when she got varry bad and hysterical with it all, he sent a footman for t' doctor, and so left her by hersen, and went off to t' meet, as if nothing was."

"I think he did just right, Jonathan."

"Then thou knows nowt about it. A man that hes so little human nature in him as to bide a bachelor for more than forty years, like thou hes, isn't able to say a sensible word about womengfolk and their feelings—not he! There's plenty of husbands, Ben, who always say the right thing, and always do the right thing, and, for all that, they are worse to live with than Blue-beards. I can tell thee that."

"St. Paul says—"

"Don't thee quote St. Paul to me about women; and, for that matter, Paul had sense enough when writing about them to say he spoke 'by permission, and not of commandment.' If Jesus Christ hed to suffer with us before he could feel with us, it's a varry unlikely thing that St. Paul could advise about women on instinct. Nineteen hundred years hes made a deal o' difference in women and wives, Ben."

"It's like it hes."

"I hev a mind to go and see Aske. I'm all in t' dark, like, and I'm feared to speak or move for fear I make bad worse."

"I'll tell thee what to do. Take wit with thy anger, and go thy ways to Aske Hall. Use thine own eyes and ears, and then thou wilt put t' saddle on t' right horse, I don't doubt. Aske's wool is a varry fine length, and we could do with all he hes of it. Tetterly got ahead of us last year, so go and speak to Aske for his next shearing, and when thou art on the ground thou can judge for thysen."

"Ay, that will be a good plan; I'll do it." Then, as he hurriedly turned over his letters, "It's a great pity, I think, that I didn't marry again before this time o' day. If I hed a wife now, Eleanor could tell her all her troubles, and she'd give her advice a man niver thinks about."

"But, then, t' wife thou is after, Jonathan, is varry little older than thy daughter; but she's a good lass. It's Sarah Benson, isn't it?"

"Ay, it's Sarah. Dost thou think she'll hev me, Ben?"

"I niver asked her. Ask her thysen. I'm nobbut a bachelor ta knows, and therefore varry ignorant about such inscrutable creatures as women. But nobody could be the worse o' Sarah Benson, and they happen might be the better. Only I'll tell thee one thing: Aske and his wife will be as mad as iver was if thou does a thing like that. Thou art a mill-owner now, and a land-owner, too, and Sarah, poor lass, is nobbut a 'hand.'"

"I was a 'hand' mysen once, Ben; and ta knows I loved her mother before Sarah was born."

"Varry good; but Squire Aske and Mistress Aske were niver 'hands'; and they know nowt at all about Sarah Benson or her mother. And thou may make up thy mind to one thing—that is, that Sarah Benson isn't t' right kind of peace-maker in any quarrel o' Squire Anthony Aske's."

Jonathan took up his letters again with a vexed face. We are not always pleased with the people who give us sensible advice; and Ben knew well that he had said words bitter as gall

to the taste, however they might be by-and-by. Very soon afterwards, however, he saw Burley standing in the mill-yard, while the hostler was getting his gig ready.

“He’ll be for Aske Hall,” thought Ben, and he went down to the gate and stood there. Six feet two, in a long, blue-checked pinafore and a cloth cap, might not strike people as a figure likely to command respect; but everything is in the circumstances and the surroundings, and Ben, among thousands similarly clad, was a very fine type of a man used to authority. Even Burley was conscious of his moral power, and although he was privately in a very bad temper, he said, “Ben, I’m going to Aske Hall; do what thou thinks best about Shillingsworth’s offer.”

“Ay, I’ll do that for sure. Good-afternoon to thee.”

CHAPTER III.

THE MASTER OF ASKE.

“A child of our grandmother Eve, a female; or, for thy more sweet understanding, a woman.”

Love's Labour's Lost.

“A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty.”

The Taming of the Shrew.

“Down on your knees,
And thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man's love.”

As You Like It.

THE moral atmosphere, like the physical one, becomes impregnated with certain aromas—absent people rule over us, get hold of us by the forces of antipathy or attraction. As Burley left the mill he was conscious of being under a dominion of this kind. His daughter had taken possession of him. She compelled him to leave his business and his bargains; she called him to her by an attraction which he did not understand, but yet felt compelled to obey.

It was a lovely afternoon, and he had a ride of six miles, a distance not worth naming in connection with the animal he was behind—one of those sturdy Suffolk Punches that can be driven one hundred and ten miles in eleven hours; the very best horse in the world before a whip; the only one that will pull twice at a dead weight. Jonathan was very fond of horses, and very kind to them. It was only his strong religious instincts which had prevented him from being a jockey. “When I was young,” he often said, “I was all for horses! My word, I could sit anything, and jump anything right and left! There was Squire Oxley's “Rampagious;” no one could mount him, and he sent for me. “Rampagious” stared at me, and I stared at

him ; then I leaped upon his back and rode him to Oxleyholme, twenty-eight miles !”

Outside his mill Jonathan was never more thoroughly happy than when he was driving a fine horse, and this afternoon, anxious and worried as he was, he felt a certain amount of relief as soon as the reins were in his hand, and he knew himself bowling away into pleasant country lanes. Swift motion seemed, at first, to be just what he most needed, but after a hard run of two miles he felt more inclined to take the distance easily. He was in a lovely road, shaded by branching limes and great elms, in which the wind swayed shadowy masses of thick leaves. The stone walls which bounded it were green with immemorial moss and fern, and fragrant with gadding honeysuckles ; and beyond he could see the quiet crofts and pastures where the slow moving cattle were grazing ; while towards the horizon the undulating country had all the mystery of brooding clouds.

This was a different atmosphere to the noisy mill, and he felt its influence ; for as a mother rocks and soothes her child at her breast, so Nature took the troubled man to her still, sweet heart, and he was comforted and knew not how. The last two miles were through the shady beech woods and fine parks of the Aske Manor, and the effect upon Burley’s temper was a beneficial one. The man who inherited such a grand old mansion and such rich lands through twelve generations of gentlemen was not one to be rated like a cotton-spinner. He told himself that Aske might have rights peculiarly his own, and that any woman would owe something to the love which had selected her from all the world to share such an honorable position.

Aske had also been peculiarly generous about Eleanor’s fortune. He would have married her without a penny, if Burley had not insisted on making over positively the fifty thousand pounds he intended as his daughter’s portion. Riding slowly through Aske’s lands, Burley got a view of his son-in-law’s side of the quarrel ; and he was more just to him than he had been in Burley House and in Burley Mills. He even began to sus-

pect that Eleanor might have been "trying." He remembered certain times in his own experience when she had been "beyond everything" so; and he made up his mind to give no encouragement to her unreasonable demands, for he was quite sure now they were in the main unreasonable.

But when a man reckons up a woman in her absence, his decisions are very apt to amount to nothing when brought face to face with her. Just as soon as Burley met his daughter she regained her influence over him. She was sitting in her own parlor, a dainty room full of all sorts of pretty luxuries, and sweet with stands of exquisite flowers. Never had she seemed so radiantly beautiful in his eyes. Her flowing robe of soft scarlet merino gave a wonderful brilliancy to the snow and rose of her complexion and the pale gold of her loosened hair. She flung down the novel she was reading at his entrance, and with a cry of joy went to meet him.

"Father! father!"

The dear, simple words flung the inmost door of his heart open to her. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "My lass! my dear lass! I am glad to see thee." She drew the low chair in which she had been sitting beside him, and took his large, brown hand between her white, jewelled ones, and stroked and fondled it. Aske was out riding, and Burley determined to take the opportunity and talk wisely to his child. He would advise her to do what was kind and right, but at the same time he knew that, right or wrong, he would defend her to the last shilling of his money and the last hour of his life.

But who can reason with a high-tempered woman into whom the spirit of wilful contradiction has entered? The quarrel between Eleanor and her husband had come to a struggle for supremacy, and Eleanor was determined not to submit. And alas! the tenacity with which a woman will hold a post of this kind is amazing; there is no driving her from it, no compromise, no terms of capitulation of which she can conceive.

In the midst of a very unsatisfactory conversation Aske entered. He was a small, slight man of fair complexion, with an

honest, kindly face, and a pleasant shrewdness in the eyes. Jonathan could have carried him almost as easily as a child ; but inches and weight were no indication of the real man. The real Anthony Aske was self-poised, quickly observant, and cool-headed, without being cold. He had a refined mouth, a wilful chin, and those wide-open gray eyes, with the bluish tint of steel in them, that always indicate a resolute and straightforward character. He looked at Eleanor as he entered the room, and his glance roused and irritated her ; but she met it fearlessly, with her handsome head a little on one side and perceptibly lifted, and a smile which was at once attractive and provoking.

Aske had a great respect for his father-in-law, and no intention whatever of making him a partner in his domestic troubles. To tell the truth, he was not seriously uneasy about them. He had anticipated some difficulty in transforming the spoiled daughter into an obedient, gentle wife ; but any doubts as to his ultimate success had never assailed him. "The Taming of the Shrew" is a drama every young husband believes himself capable of playing ; and Eleanor's anger and scorn, her disobediences, and her sins of omission and commission against his authority, were not things which greatly dismayed or hurt him. He loved her none the less as yet for them ; and he confidently looked forward to a time when she would acknowledge the matrimonial bit, and answer the lightest touch of his guiding rein. In the interval he felt the dispute to be entirely their own, and he desired neither assistance nor sympathy from outsiders regarding it.

He met Burley with the frankest welcome, and soon took him away to the gardens and stables. Jonathan was greatly impressed with all he saw. Aske's was evidently the eye of the diligent and kind master. In the gardens, the hot-houses, the park, the most beautiful profusion and the most beautiful order reigned. The great court, surrounded by the stables and barns and granaries, was a place for men to linger delightedly in. Aske was fond of horses, and he knew a great deal about

them ; but that day Jonathan Burley amazed him. He looked at the cotton-spinner with admiration, and the cotton-spinner keenly enjoyed his little triumph.

For two hours the men were really happy together, and they had found one topic at least on which both could talk with unflagging interest. Eleanor watched them coming along the terrace talking with animation, her father's hand upon her husband's shoulder, and Anthony's gay, short laugh chorusing some merry recital of Jonathan's younger days. Her heart burned with anger. She felt as if her father was a traitor to her cause. As for her husband, he was trying to put himself in matrimonial colors which he did not deserve ; trying to deceive her father, and to give him a wrong impression as to his treatment of her.

When Aske, under the happy influence of that confidential two hours, met her, it was with lover-like admiration and affection. She had dressed herself with wonderful skill and taste, and his eyes brightened with pleasure as he looked at her. But she answered his glance with one of intelligent scorn. She was determined he should understand that she had seen through his effusive demonstrations towards her father. So the dinner, though an excellent one, faultlessly served, was a very painful meal. Eleanor was satirical, mocking, brilliant, almost defiant, and Jonathan suffered keenly amid the flying shafts of her ready tongue. But he remembered that a little meddling will make a deal of care, and he tried to pass over the unpleasant, doubtful speeches. As for Aske, he received them with an impassive good-humor ; he talked well and rapidly, and kept the conversation as far as possible from all domestic topics.

After dinner there was a most uncomfortable two hours ; but Aske throughout them exhibited in a marked manner the influence which gentle traditions and fine breeding exercise. Upon his own hearth-stone he would protect his father-in-law from every annoyance, if it were possible to do so ; and though he was naturally a much more passionate man than Burley, he never once suffered his good temper to desert him amid his wife's innuendoes and scornful sarcasms.

Not so with Jonathan. He was astonished, pained, and then angry, and when this point had been reached he showed it by lapsing into a frowning silence. But Eleanor seemed possessed by a spirit of aggravation; her father's evident disapproval taught her no restraint, and her husband's amiability nettled and irritated her. At length Burley rose impatiently and said, "Aske, I'll be obliged to thee if thou wilt order my gig. I'd better be going, I'm sure."

Left for a few minutes with his daughter, he turned to her, and asked, sternly, "Whatever is t' matter wi' thee? Thou hast behaved thysen varry badly to-night. Thou niver acted like this at Burley; and if thou had, I would have put an end to it varry soon—thou may be sure o' that."

"Nobody ordered me about at Burley. I did just what I wanted to do. You never quarrelled with me, father."

"I'm varry sure it wasn't thy husband as was quarrelsome to-night. Far from it. He was patient beyond iverything. A better man to bear wi' a cross, unreasonable, provoking woman I niver saw! Niver!"

"You know nothing about him, father. Patient! Why, he has the angry word before the angry thought; and as for being quarrelsome, sooner than want a reason for a dispute, Anthony would quarrel with Aske, and Aske with Anthony."

"I warn thee, Eleanor. Take care what thou art doing. It is far easier to put t' devil in a good husband than to get him out. If thy mother hed iver talked to me as thou talked to Anthony this night, I would have gone to t' mill and I would hev stopped there till she said she was 'shamed o' hersen; yes, I would, if I'd stopped there t' rest o' my life."

"I suppose all husbands are alike. I have no doubt they are."

"Nay, then, they aren't. There are some varry bad ones, and some varry good ones. Thou hes got a better than thou deserves. And don't thee forget one thing — thou can sow scornful, doubtful speeches if thou wants to, but thou will be sure to reap a fine harvest of plain, even-down hatred and sorrow. Mind what I say."

But though he thought it right to speak thus to her, he had never loved and admired her so much. Marriage had developed the beautiful girl into a splendidly brilliant woman. The magnificence of her dress at dinner, the haughty confidence of her manner affected him strangely. He rode home in a conflict of emotion, but the end of every train of thought was the same—"She was a good, loving lass when she was under my roof, and there is bound to be summat wrong wi' Aske or wi' his way o' managing her."

The night was dark and close, and Jonathan was unusually sad; for it is the best natures that are most easily subjugated by moral miasmas. He had been full of love and hope, and suddenly a supposition of evil and sorrow had put its hand upon him. He could not close his ears or pass it by. It had taken its place upon his hearth-stone, and he was compelled to listen to it. He was in the atmosphere of an ill-conditioned temper, of a soul determined to quarrel with existence, and he was worried by an uncertainty which doubled his anxieties. For though he was angry with Eleanor, he was yet inclined to believe that her rebellion was, in some way or other, entirely Aske's fault. "It isn't fair," he muttered, "to badger a lass into such a way! I think little of a man that can't give up a bit to his wife."

When he reached his park gates, Ben Holden was slowly walking about in front of them. He came up to the gig as Jonathan tightened the reins, and said, "Thou's earlier than might be."

"Whatever art thou here for? Is owt wrong at t' mill?"

"Not likely. There is an offer from Longworthy, and he wants 'yes' or 'no' in t' morning. Thou knows thy mind on that subject, and we'd better send a night message."

"Ay, we had. Get into t' gig, and we'll talk it over."

When the house was reached, Burley said, "That's all about Longworthy; but come in and hev a bit o' cold meat. I want to talk to thee." Then turning to the groom: "Mind thou rubs t' little beast down well, and give him a good supper and bed. I'll mebbe be in to see after thee."

There was a rack in the chimney-corner full of long, clean clay pipes; and after the "bit o' cold meat" the two men sat down to smoke. Hitherto their talk had been of wool and yarns and wages, but after a short silence Jonathan said, "I hev been to Aske Hall."

"Well?"

"Nay, it isn't well. It is varry ill, as far as I can see. I don't know whatever is come over my lass. She was always bidable wi' me. I can't help blaming Aske, though he was as patient and kind as niver was to-night."

"Aske is a tight master; he's more than likely to be a tight husband."

"And my Eleanor is none used to take either bid or buffet."

"That's where all t' trouble wi' womankind begins. If Aske hedn't set her up on a monument when he was courting her, she wouldn't hev hed to come down to t' common level after it. If iver I go a-courting, I'll tell no lies to t' lass. I'll not mak' her an angel before t' wedding, and nobbut a wife after it."

"Thou art a wise man, Ben, but when thou falls in love thou wilt do as wiser men than thee hev done."

"Ah, *when I fall in love*. But this is what I mean. Aske, before he got wed, was niver happy but when he was doing this and doing that, and running here and running there, to pleasure his lady. It was 'What can I get thee?' and 'What shall I say to thee?' and 'What can I do for thee?' And whether she smiled or frowned she was perfect. He liked to dawdle round her better than to go hunting or shooting. He thought little o' Aske Hall then, and was forever at thy house. His place on t' magistrate's bench was always empty, for he were sitting at Miss Burley's feet. As for farming matters, or government matters, he reckoned nowt o' them. He were too happy singing fal-la-la songs wi' thy lass, or rambling hand in hand wi' her in t' garden or park. Now then, he gets wed, and all at once t' angel, and t' queen, and t' mistress of his soul and life is turned into a varry faultable woman. He not only stops all his false worship, but he wants to get up on t' monument him-

sen and hev t' deposed idol do the worshipping. My word! It's not natural to expect it—that is, if t' idol has any feelings more than a stick or a stone."

"Now thou talks sensible. But heving found out t' cause o' t' trouble, what would ta do to mend it?"

"I would speak to Aske quietly, and advise him to tak' his freedom without any swagger. Mistress Aske will come down step by step if he'll give her a helping hand and a pleasant word. And I'd speak to her likewise, and tell her that a wife's glory is her obedience. Thou knows."

"Nay, Ben, it's bachelors that know all about women and wives; I'll tell thee what, it's hard on my Eleanor, in any case."

For Jonathan loved his daughter very tenderly, and her little joyful cry of "*Father! father!*" still echoed in his memory. He looked around his lonely, silent rooms, and remembered how bright and gay they had been during the few happy years when she had held a kind of court in them. Nothing that his friend had said had helped him much, yet it had been some comfort to talk of his trouble to one whom he knew to be both wise and faithful. Still, at the end of an hour's conversation little had been gained, and as their friendship had no pretences, Ben said, as he was leaving, "I hevn't done thee any good;" and Jonathan answered, "No, thou hesn't. I didn't expect it."

"Varry well, then, thou knows *Who* can do thee good, and if I'd been thee I would hev gone to Him first off."

And Jonathan bent his head in reply, and then went to his lonely room, where he sat still, brooding over his heavy thoughts for some time. For, though he kept saying to himself, "It's only a bit of a tiff, and most couples have them," he could not get rid of a presentiment that he had entered into the chill of a long-shadowed sorrow. But when he rose up from his sombre meditation he went to a little table on which there was a Bible, and he laid his open palm upon it, and said, softly, "*Like as a father pitieh his children—*" and in the solemn pause and upward glance there was a mighty and a comprehensive petition that only God could answer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MASTER'S LOVE.

“Our lives most dear are never near,
Our thoughts are never far apart,
Though all that draws us heart to heart
Seems fainter now, and now more clear.

“To-night love claims his full control,
And with desire and with regret
My soul this hour has drawn your soul
A little nearer yet.”

AN admirable reticence distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon concerning the woman he loves. A Frenchman will talk you blind about his Julia's eyes, and ride about the world with the name of his lady-love forever on the tip of his tongue; but not even to Ben Holden did Jonathan talk much of his love for Sarah Benson. Yet it had become the sweetest part of his life. Without absolutely watching her, he was aware of all things which concerned her, and her presence and movements made upon him that impression which the most trifling facts connected with the person we love must make.

It was a fine night in the middle of January, and Jonathan had been to the chapel at a leader's meeting. The financial affairs of the circuit were very much in his hands, and he managed them with the same prudence that he managed the affairs of his own mill. But it was not of them he was musing as he walked thoughtfully home in the moonlight. His daughter's troubles lay heavy upon his heart, for things had not grown pleasanter between Aske and his wife during the past three months. With all the love and authority which his relation-

ship warranted he had advised the unhappy woman; but advice is a medicine few people ever really take. And even where it accorded with Eleanor's own convictions of right, she generally found excuses for setting it aside. "The more I submit, father," she had said, passionately, that very afternoon, "the more unreasonable and tyrannical he is;" and Jonathan had reflected with a sigh that such a result was natural, and to be expected.

Little good came of his anxiety and worry, but yet he could not keep his daughter's marriage out of his mind, and doubtless he let it "fret him to evil" every time he entertained it. This night as he thought of his beautiful child, and of the fifty thousand pounds which he had so cheerfully given to make her happy, he felt bitter and hard towards his son-in-law. And to Aske he had not been able to speak. Once only he had attempted to open the delicate subject, and the young husband had met the overture with such a frigid coldness and haughty air as to effectually check Jonathan's further advances.

His sorrow made him feel his loneliness, his need of human kindness and of human love, and then his heart turned to Sarah Benson. He had hoped that when his daughter went to Aske, Sarah would be more inclined to listen to his suit: but even in this respect things had gone badly with him. He felt that she avoided him, and he saw that her eyes were full of trouble. The road between Barton Chapel and Burley House was a lonely bit of highway, running along the edge of the moor, with Barton Woods on one side of it. Men in groups of two and three passed him at intervals; they were mill-hands, with the loud, grating voices of men leading a hard life, so he easily gathered from their conversation that they had been to the weekly prayer-meeting. They all gave him a "Good-night, master!" as they passed; and he watched them trudging down the hill to their little cottages, with a half-conscious remembrance of the days when he had been their fellow.

There were several paths through Barton Woods leading from the road to the little villages on the other side of it. Suddenly Jonathan heard the voice of some one coming singing through

the lonely place—singing as the untutored sing, with a shrill melancholy, dwelling chiefly on the high notes. He knew the voice well, and he stood still to listen.

“ ‘ I have waited for thee,’ He murmured,
‘ Through weary nights and days,
Beside the well in the twilight,
And along thy devious ways—
But thou wert content to miss Me,’
And I met His tender gaze.

“ ‘ Content no more, sweet Master,
Except Thou be with me
From this time forth in the city,
Where my daily toil must be ;
And at evening-time by the fountain,
Where I will sing to Thee.’

“ He raised me up and blessed me,
That sweet yet awful Priest ;
He gave me the Cup of Blessing
From the eternal Feast,
The wine with hues more radiant
Than sunrise in the east.”

Here the singer came to a little stile, fifty yards in advance of Jonathan, passed over it into the highway, and went forward, singing,

“ Dear heart, I have found the Master,
He is sweet beyond compare ;
He will save and comfort the weary soul,
He will make thee white and fair.
Not as I gave will He give,
But wine divine and rare.”

“ Sarah !”

“ He is with me in the tumult
Of the city harsh and dim ;
And at evening by the fountain,
Where I sit and sing to Him.
Now He wears a veil of shadows
On the face divine and fair,
But His angels whisper to me,
‘ There will be no shadows there.’ ”

“Sarah!”

She turned, and stood still until Jonathan reached her.

“I thought it was thy voice I heard in Barton Woods. Eh, lass! I am glad to see thee. Is all well wi’ thee?”

“I try to think so, master. One mustn’t expect too much o’ this life.”

“Steve’s loom has stood still varry often lately. It’s enough to try anybody’s patience. It is that.”

“I know it, master. But thou wilt bear a bit longer wi’ him?”

“Is that what thou thinks?”

“Ay, it is.”

“I’ll do anything thou asks me to do. Sarah, can thou give me one kind thought? I would be glad to bear a’ thy crosses for thee. If thou would marry me I would put up wi’ all that thou loves for thy dear sake. Can ta see thy way clear to wed me, Sarah?”

As they stood together he lifted her hand and clasped it between his own. The moonlight fell all over Sarah’s slight figure in its black cloak, and gave a touching beauty to her face, perfectly outlined by the little woollen kerchief pinned tightly over the head and under the chin.

“Can ta see thy way clear to wed me, Sarah?”

“Nay, I can’t. I am in a deal o’ trouble about Steve.”

“I’ll do owt thou wishes for Steve. He is thy brother, and I can do a deal for thy sake.”

“He’s a varry proud lad, sir. He’ll not take a halfpenny from anybody.”

“Not he. He takes thy money, and thy time, and all thou hes.”

“Ay, he does that; but he has a right to ‘em. Five minutes before mother died she asked me niver to give Steve up, niver to leave him as long as he needed me. She entered heaven wi’ my promise in her hands. Dost ta think I can break it? Would ta want me to break it? I can’t give my life to him and to thee, too. Thou wouldn’t want me with a broken vow and a half heart, Jonathan Burley?”

"God bless thee, Sarah. Do thy duty, my lass; I can go on loving and waiting."

"Then good-night, master. I'll go home without thee. We might happen meet folk nearer t' village, and there's them that would see wrong if their eyes were out."

Jonathan waited at the stile and watched her down the hill. She sung no more. She felt that he had come very close to her heart, and the longing for the rest and for the higher things which would be a part of the love offered her, was so strong for a moment or two that it cost her a few heavy tears to put all hope of them away. Her eyes were still misty when she reached the cottage. The key had been left at a neighbor's, and she hoped Steve was at home. But all was dark and lonely.

If for a little while she had fainted in spirit the weakness was over. She put the fire together, and the cheery blaze was soon making pictures among the pewter and crockery on the cottage walls. Then she brought the table before it and laid it for supper. "He'll varry like be hungry when he comes in," she whispered to herself; and she cut a slice of cold mutton and shred an onion with it, and set the pan to simmer on the hob. She hurried for fear all would not be ready when he arrived; but ten o'clock struck, and the savory dish began to waste away, and she was so hungry that she was compelled to eat her haver-cake and cheese alone.

It was eleven o'clock when Steve came, and there was a look on his face she had never seen there before—a look of exultation and pleasure, uncertain in character, and attended with an unusual silence.

"My lad, what's the matter wi' thee? Thou doesn't eat thy victuals, either; there's summat up."

"Ay, there is; but I'm feared to tell thee."

"Nay, but thou needn't be. Is ta in any trouble?"

"Not I, lass. I'm varry happy. Nobbut I'm going to be wed."

"Thou—art—what?"

“Going to be wed.”

She stood up and looked at him, turning white as she did so, even to her lips. A sense of wrong and a great anger welled up in her heart; and she lifted the loaf and went with it into the pantry to hide the tears she could not suppress.

Steve kept his eyes on his plate. He was eating with a keen relish, now that his confession was made; but there was a bitter moment or two in Sarah's heart ere she could command herself sufficiently to ask, “Who is ta going to wed?”

“Joyce Barnes.”

“Niver!”

“Ay; it's a wonder such a bonny lass should hev me. But Joyce hes promised, and I'm that set up to-night, I can scarce tell what I'm doing or saying.”

“How is ta going to keep her?”

“I'll work steady now. I've been so bothered about Joyce lately that I couldn't work; but I'll miss no days now.”

“Then thou wilt do more for Joyce Barnes than iver thou did either for thy mother or me.”

“It need make no difference between us, Sarah.”

“Ay, but it will.”

“And thou needn't make any change for my wedding. There is room enough for three, I'se warrant.”

Sarah looked quickly into the handsome, wavering countenance. It was evident to her, from Steve's remark, that he considered the furniture of the cottage his own. Yet it had been slowly gathered by Sarah's mother and by Sarah herself. He had never taken a thought about it, or given a shilling towards it. But still, he had a comfortable conviction that whatever a parent left belonged of right to the son, in preference to the daughter. And Sarah felt that if Steve chose to take all on this ground, he must do so. She would scorn to claim even the additions made with her own earnings since her mother's death, unless Steve should recognize her right and insist upon her taking them.

When she talked the matter over with him in the morning

he made no allusion to these articles. Perhaps his facile mind had forgotten them ; at any rate, his one anxiety was to make the cottage as pretty as possible for his bride. "And I'll trust it all to thee, Sarah," he said, with a calm, unconscious selfishness that roused in his sister's heart almost as much pity as anger. For she considered that he had been accustomed all his life to look upon her self-denial as his peculiar right ; and, after all, it was like expecting consideration from a child to expect it from Steve.

"I'll hev everything as sweet and clean as hands can make 'em," she answered ; "but, Steve, Joyce can do what she likes with t' room that will be empty up-stairs."

"What does ta mean, Sarah ? Isn't ta going to keep thy own room ? There's no fear but what Joyce will be varry pleasant wi' thee ; and we'll get along varry contented together."

"Does ta really think I am going to bide on here ?"

"To be sure I do. Why not ?"

"My word ! but thou is mistaken, then. Joyce and me hev nothing likely between us. She hesn't a pleasure above a new dress or a picnic, and she'll hev no end o' company here. I couldn't live among such carryings-on—not I. Old Martha Crossley will let me hev a room, and thou will get on varry well without me. I can see that, my lad."

For it wounded her terribly that Steve made scarcely a decent opposition to this plan, though in reality he was more thoughtless than heartless in the matter. Only, when thoughtlessness wounds love, it is a cruel sin ; and Sarah was in a state of rebellious grief the next two weeks. But she cleaned the cottage with an almost superfluous care, though the whitewashing and scrubbing and polishing had all to be done between mill hours. The bitter tears she shed over the work she permitted no human eye to see ; for she was well aware that her grief would be little understood—would even, perhaps, be imputed to selfish and unworthy motives.

Yet the simple fact of Steve's marriage was not what hurt

her. She had expected that event, had looked forward to it, and begun to love the girl she had hoped would have been his choice—a good, industrious girl, with whom she would have gladly shared her brother's love and the comfortable home her labor and economy had made. But Joyce Barnes!—a gay, idle, extravagant lass of seventeen years, whose highest ambition was a bonnet with artificial flowers—that was a different thing.

Then, also, she had been excluded from all share or sympathy in the affair. Steve had given her no confidence—had never, indeed, named Joyce to her. Perhaps he had feared that she would oppose his marriage; but she felt quite sure that if Steve had confessed his love, and asked her to bear with Joyce, and help her to do right, she could have loved her for his sake. But she had only been thought of when the wedding had been arranged, and her presence in the cottage was likely to interfere with the lovers. Steve had always brought his troubles to her for help and consolation, but he had deliberately shut her out from the joy of his love and marriage.

The day before it took place she got a room from Martha Crossley, and moved her box of clothing there. She did not touch the smallest thing that had been used in common; but it was not without a pang she resigned the simple chairs and tables, bought with much self-denial, and endeared to her by the memory of the mother who had shared it. In the savings-bank there was the sum of eleven pounds in their joint names. Nearly every shilling of it had been placed there by Sarah, and Steve was well aware of the fact. Yet when she proposed to divide it equally, he accepted the proposal without a demur. For of all human creatures, lovers are the most shamelessly selfish; and at this time Steve was ready to sacrifice any one for the pretty girl he was going to marry. It was Sarah's money, and he knew it; but his one thought in the matter was, that it would enable him to take his bride to Blackpool for a whole week.

The summer which followed this marriage was full of grief

to Sarah—grief of that kind which lets the life out in pin-pricks—small, mean griefs, that a brave, noble heart folds the raiment over and bears. Steve's ostentatious happiness was almost offensive, and she could not but notice that he was never now absent from his loom. She told herself that she ought to be glad, and that she was glad; but still she could not help a sigh for the mother-love and the sister-love which he had so long tried and wounded by his indifference and his laziness.

They met at the mill every day, and Sarah always asked kindly after Joyce. There was little need, however, to do so. Steve could talk of nothing but Joyce—her likings and dislikings, her ailments, her new dresses, or the friends who had been to take a bit of supper with them. Now, it is far easier for a woman to be self-denying than to be just; and, in spite of all her efforts, Sarah did often feel it very hard to listen to him with a show of interest and good-humor.

About the end of the summer there came a change. Steve had finished a beautiful web, and it brought him to the notice of a firm who offered him a larger wage than he was receiving from Burley. "Don't thee take such an offer, Steve," urged Sarah. "Burley hes been varry good and patient wi' thee. Thou may get five shillings a week more and be the worse off, I can tell thee that."

But Joyce thought differently. "Steve's work wasn't common work," she said, "and he had been underpaid for a long time. Steve had a right to better himsen; and it was fair selfishness in Sarah to want to keep him backward, just so as she could hev him working at her elbow." Besides, Joyce had calculated that the five shillings extra would give them a trip every other week; it would do, in fact, so many fine things that Steve felt as if it would be throwing away a fortune to refuse the offer.

So he left Burley's Mill and went to Chorley's, and held himself quite above his old work-fellows in the change. Burley let him go without a word of remonstrance. He was almost glad

when there was another face at his loom ; yet he watched Sarah anxiously, to see how the change affected her. She was paler, and she sang less at her work, but this alteration had been a gradual one—so gradual that nobody but Jonathan had noticed it.

He looked in vain, however, for any recognition from her. Every day, when he visited the weaving-room, his glance asked her a question she never answered. He tried to meet her coming from chapel ; but if he did so she was always with some of her mates, and he could only pass on with a “Good-night, lasses!” to their greeting.

But though all our plans fail, when the time comes the meeting is sure ; and one night, as Jonathan was leaving a friend’s house at a very late hour, he saw a figure before him that he knew on sight, under any circumstances. He was astonished that Sarah should be out so late, especially as the rain was pouring down, and the night so black that nothing was distinguishable excepting as it passed the misty street lamps. They were quite alone, the village was asleep, and he was soon at her side.

“I hev found thee by thysen at last, Sarah. Whereiver hes ta been, my lass ?”

“Granny Oddy is dying. I was keeping the watch until midnight with her.”

“What hes ta to say to me now? Steve has left thee altogether now, hasn’t he ?”

“Ay, but I can’t leave him.”

“He doesn’t need thee now, Sarah.”

“But he’s going to need me, and that’s worse than iver.”

“Why-a! I thought he wer doing extra well.”

“I think he was niver doing so badly. They are living at heck and manger, master ; and Joyce hed a little lass last week, and she’s varry dwining and sick. I went there last night, and cleaned up things a bit for her. It isn’t like t’ old place ; not at all.”

“Hes ta no word of hope for me, then ?”

“Nay, I hevn’t; not yet.”

“It’s varry hard on me, Sarah.”

“Happen it isn’t easy on other folk.”

“Thank thee, lass. There’s a bit o’ comfort in them words. Some day I’ll bear thy troubles for thee. I shall still hope for that.”

CHAPTER V.

SARAH'S SORROW.

“Ingratitude's the growth of every clime,
And in this thankless world the givers
Are envied even by the receivers;
'Tis now the cheap and frugal fashion
Rather to hide than pay the obligation;
Nay 'tis much worse than so—
It now an artifice doth grow,
Wrongs and outrages to do,
Lest men should think we owe.”

COWLEY.

JONATHAN saw little of his daughter for some weeks after his visit to Aske Hall. She did not perceive the sympathy in her father's heart, and his few sharp words thoroughly disconcerted her. The struggle for supremacy, however, still went on between Anthony and herself; and there were encounters and reconciliations, stratagems and truces, and diplomatic approaches, just as real and clever as if the points at issue had been of national importance.

In the mean time, Eleanor was making a great social triumph, and Jonathan hardly lifted a local newspaper in which her own entertainments, or her appearance at the entertainments of others, was not flatteringly commented on. Sometimes he would point them out to Ben Holden; but whether he did or not, Ben always knew when they were there by the fatherly pride on Jonathan's face, and the respectful manner with which he laid aside that particular number of the *Guardian* or the *Mercury*.

At least once or twice in the month he received a pretty un-business-like envelope of thick satin paper closed with the Aske arms. It was the formal invitation to a dinner at Aske; and

though it was understood to be a ceremony, all the same, the ceremony pleased Jonathan. "Thou sees," he said one morning to Ben Holden, "I might sit and hobnob wi' Baron Fairley, and t' Lord High Sheriff, and t' member for Parliament and all t' rest of t' quality, if I hed a mind to," and he pushed towards him Eleanor's pretty invitation, with a very poor pretence of indifference.

"Why doesn't ta go an odd time?"

"Because I doan't like to go where I can't do mysen justice. When I take t' chair at t' wool-exchange dinner I feel all there. But at Aske's they'll talk of hunting and coursing, and what t' magistrates hev been doing; or mebbe about t' last new novel, and such like, and I'd hev to sit and listen, and look like a fool. Yet thou knows, Ben, when t' talk is about wool and trade and manufacturing, I can hold my own with t' best of them."

"Thou hes a deal o' pride in thee yet, Jonathan Burley."

"I doan't say I hevn't; but happen if thou would look near home thou would find a feeling or two quite as faulty."

"Thou says right. I'll hev to look after Ben Holden a bit. But thou arn't a fool on any subject. A man that can manage to keep his frames going, whatever sort o' weather there is in t' manufacturing world, is a man whose opinions are worth listening to on any subject; and I'd like well for thee to hev a talk wi' Baron Fairley. He's got a mind above t' common run."

"Nay, I doan't think so! He's got some kind o' wimwam in his head about educating t' working-class."

"And why not? Why not, Jonathan?"

"Because we shall hev no end of worry and suffering before we can manage to give 'em enough learning to enable them to put it to right uses. Thou hes only to look at Tim Sharp and Bob Linker to find out that a little learning is a varry dangerous thing."

"There ought to be something taken on trust for t' working man of t' future."

"Not there. We take men as we find 'em, Ben, and not as they are to be. T' world is an infidel world; it can be made

to see, but it can't be made to trust. I know what t' working-man is, and I wouldn't lend a sixpence on what he is going to be. If t' grace of Jesus Christ isn't enough to lift him up, I think all t' science and philosophy they can put into him will only make a bigger failure of him. People nowadays talk of t' sciences they hev invented, as if they thought they would take 'em to heaven—but I'm cheating this hour out o' its lawful work talking to thee; and, after all, t' art o' living is t' main thing. If we could only—rich and poor—manage to master that study, it would be t' greatest thing as could be."

It was on the night following this conversation that Jonathan met Sarah after her late watch with Granny Oddy. A less romantic walk than that through the dark, muddy street could scarcely be imagined; and yet never had the woman beloved by Jonathan come so nearly and so dearly to him. For a few hundred yards she had walked under the shelter of his umbrella, and by the last misty lamp they had stood a moment to say "good-by." The slight figure, in its black, dripping cloak, and the pale, thoughtful face under the black hood, appealed to him as no beauty radiant with joy and sumptuously clothed could have done. Sombre and sad as the figure was which he watched disappear within Martha Crossley's cottage door, it was a figure full of all noble significance and of every womanly grace to Jonathan Burley.

He plodded on, almost cheerfully, through the dreary down-pour, thinking of the admission she had made—that it was as hard for her as for him—and the promise in it, indefinite as it was, made him tread lightly and walk at a far swifter pace than usual. The walk at that hour and in such weather was a bit of self-denial on Jonathan's part, and this night he felt fully repaid for it.

"If I hed been riding, ten to one I'd hev missed her," he said; "and, my word! I'd hev walked all night for the words she spoke to me."

He was wet through when he reached his home, and the house-keeper met him with a face full of disapproval. "It isn't

right, sir, nor what's to be expected, sir, with a stable full of horses, and a groom that lazy as it would be good for him to hev to wait a bit, and get well wet."

"It would be varry wrong, Mrs. Knowles, if I kept man and beast waiting in the storm for me while I was eating and drink-ing and heving a good time. And if I get wet through, I can hev dry clothes and a drop o' something warm to make me comfortable; and if I get cold I can grumble about it, and I hev a first-rate house-keeper to see that I get my hot gruels, and my bit o' good eating; but it's different with t' poor beasts—now isn't it?"

In fact, Jonathan was in a kind mood with all the world that night. Even Steve Benson came in for a few pitying thoughts, although he was very justly angry at Steve for his defection and ingratitude. "He's a poor silly lad, and he's none fit for a weaving-room; and if Sarah will only wed me, I'll set him up in some other way." Across his mind there came a thought of an American farm. It might be the salvation of Steve; and Jonathan felt sure that he would be much happier if the lad were too far away to be perpetually coming between Sarah and himself.

One day, towards the end of April, Mrs. Aske's carriage stopped at the gates of Burley's Mill, and Eleanor stepped lightly from the handsome vehicle. Jonathan saw her approach, and went to meet her; and as they crossed the mill-yard together, he was very proud of the beautiful woman by his side, and pleasantly conscious of the many faces watching them from the windows. Eleanor wore a rich violet-colored silk robe, and a very beautiful ermine cloak, and she carried her fair head loftily as a queen, resting herself slightly upon her father's arm.

Aske was not with her. He had gone to his saddler's and would call in half an hour; "And, father," said Eleanor, joyfully, "we are going to London. Lady Fairley is to present me at court, and Anthony has taken a fine house, and I intend to have a royal time for the rest of the season."

"I am glad to hear thou art so happy. It isn't ivery lass that is as fortunate as thou art."

She took no notice of the remark, but went on to detail the interesting points in the proposed visit. And as Jonathan watched her luminous face all aglow with expectation, and expressing a score of flitting emotions, he thought how lovely she was, and how easy it must be for her to influence her husband, if she only took a little trouble to effect her purpose.

In about an hour Aske called. He was so handsome and gentlemanly, so disposed to be friendly to his father-in-law and amiable to Eleanor, that an observant person would never have detected the marked authority of his manner, or her half-resentful submission to it. In the midst of a gay conversation Aske said, suddenly, "Come, Eleanor, we must go. The horses have not been exercised, and are restive."

"I don't want to go just yet." She was standing at her father's side, and she laid her hand upon his shoulder and kissed him.

"We must go now, at once." His face darkened as he reiterated the order, and his mouth, finely formed as it was, closed with an ominous resolution.

"Thou had better go, my dear lass. I know what under-worked horses are capable of, and thou can hear them champing and stamping outside. Kiss me, my bonny Eleanor, and God Almighty bless thee."

Then he rose, and they went together to the gates. But all the light was out of Eleanor's face, and her large gray eyes were troubled and full of tears. The look in them made Jonathan's heart burn; and though he said farewell to Aske with civility and good words, he did not offer him his hand. As the carriage drove away, Eleanor leaned forward and looked steadily at her father. He lifted his hat and watched her out of sight with a sorrowful face. She seemed now always to bring a shadow with her, no matter under what circumstances they met.

"What does ta look so troubled about?"

"I don't really know, Ben. My daughter always gives me a feeling of trouble."

"Now, look here! if there is a cross for thee, thou will come to it in the right time. Then take it up and carry it like a good man should do. But don't thee go out of thy way to *find* a cross; that's as bad as going out of it to escape one."

"I am afraid, Ben, my lass isn't a happy wife."

"There are women, and women, Jonathan, who always see a black spot in their sunshine. It's their own shadow."

"If I thought Aske was unkind to her, I would—"

"Fret not thyself to do evil in anywise; thou art old enough to know that there is no foolery like falling out. Come, come, I thought they looked a varry comfortable-like couple. Shadows grow bright if folks hev patience."

And for some weeks it seemed as if Ben's prediction were correct. The *éclat* and splendor of her London life satisfied Eleanor's ambition. She was "presented" by Lady Fairley, and she made a great sensation in society. Mrs. Anthony Aske's beauty, her dress, her receptions, and her fine manners, filled quite a space in the *Court Journal*. Jonathan was not indifferent to his daughter's social triumph. He bought a dozen copies of the paper and intended sending them to all his friends; but, in some way or other, Ben Holden discovered his intention.

"Don't thou do it, Jonathan," he said. "I'm 'shamed to see an old man like thee going about wi' a paper like that in his pocket. Kissing t' Queen's hand is a grand thing, no doubt; but it's a far grander thing to hev built this mill, and to carry in thy brain and hands the living of nearly a thousand human beings. If ta isn't proud o' that, for goodness' sake don't be a fool about a show o' feathers and diamonds."

"Happen thou art in t' right, Ben."

He laid the papers aside, and went out of the office with the overseer. Somehow the thought of Sarah Benson came with an irresistible force to him; and as Ben went down to the engine-room he ascended to the upper weaving-shed. He had not

seen Sarah for many days, and he had not spoken to her since that hour in which he had met her in the dark, rainy midnight nearly four months previously. It was his custom to visit several of the looms before he went near Sarah's—sometimes even to pass hers by with only a casual glance—and there were several girls whose work he admired or criticised with far greater freedom. Conscience did not make him cowardly, for he had not a thought but what was bred of honor and love, but it did make him self-conscious, and even a little nervous.

But this day, when he came to Sarah's loom, he could not pass it. There had been something in his eager, longing gaze which had compelled the girl to lift her eyes to meet it. They were red and swollen with long weeping, and her face was wan with sorrow and weariness. Jonathan was shocked. He lifted the pattern she was working from, and as he pretended to examine it, said, in a low voice, "Whatever is wrong with thee, Sarah? Thee must tell me."

"There are ill eyes watching us, master; please to go forward at once."

"I'll make thee my wife to-morrow, and shut every ill eye and stop every ill tongue."

"Thou art doing me a great wrong, looking at me that-a-way. Please thee go forward. It is t' kindest thing thou can do."

He laid down the pattern with some remark about its difficulty, and went forward and out of the room altogether. He was for the moment angry at Sarah, but that feeling was speedily superseded by one of pity and anxiety. As he was slowly going down the main stairs, he met Ben Holden coming up. He said to him, "Go into t' room where Sarah Benson is working and look at her face. Then I want thee to find out whatever is wrong with her."

In at one door and out at the other Ben went, and he appeared to glance at every one but Sarah. Yet it was only her he noted. She had evidently given more way to her grief—whatever it was—since Jonathan's visit, for Ben saw that she was quietly weeping, and that her companions lifted their eyes

a moment to her as Ben passed through the room. He did not, however, speak to any of them; he went to the lower shed and called out Jane Crossley, the granddaughter of the woman with whom Sarah lodged.

"Jane, dost ta know what Sarah Benson is fretting hersen ill about?"

"Ay, I know. I everybody knows, for that matter."

"Nay, then, I doan't; but I wish thou'd tell me. T' lass looks in a poorly way."

"Why, ta sees, she hes hed double work for her hands nigh on to four months now, and she's hed a bit o' real heart-grief last week."

"Is it about Steve?"

"In a way, it is. Thou knows after Joyce hed her little lass she was varry bad, and for two months she didn't leave her room at all. Every night as soon as Sarah had drunk off a cup o' tea, away she went to Steve's. They needed her badly there. Varry often she found both Joyce and baby crying against one another; and she hed 'em both to wash and feed and do for. Then she cooked something, and tidied up t' house, and worked away most of t' night hours. Sometimes both t' mother and child were sick, and t' poor lass wouldn't get a wink of sleep between day and day's work."

"Thou should hev helped her a bit."

"I hed my own 'lookout,' Master Holden; and both mother and granny thought Sarah did more than she was called to do, seeing that Steve could hev all t' work he hed a mind to take."

"Well, Joyce hes been up and well for a goodish bit now, hesn't she?"

"Ay, she hes; but she'd got used to Sarah helping her wi' t' washing and cleaning; got used to Sarah nursing t' child while she got a bit of sleep: and so Sarah was over at t' cottage most nights for this thing or the other. And Steve hesn't been quite as steady lately; he got out o' heart with t' expense of t' doctor and medicine, and I'll warrant Sarah hes hed to give many a shilling to make both ends of t' week meet."

"But she isn't a lass to cry over a few shillings."

"Not her, indeed. It is about t' christening she's crying, thou knows."

"Nay, I know nowt about christening."

"Well, then, t' little lass hed to be made a Christian, thou sees, and last Sunday t' job were done in fine style at t' parish church. Sarah had taken wonderful to t' baby, and she thought no less than it would be called after her, 'specially as Steve's mother and Joyce's mother had both t' same name. But Joyce wouldn't hev it. She said, 'There hed been Sarahs enough in t' family, and she had chosen *Charlotta Victoria*, and it would be a varry queer thing if a mother couldn't call her daughter t' name she liked best.'

Ben laughed sarcastically; he could not control this expression of his opinion. "You women are a queer lot," he said; "whatever did she want a name like that for?"

"Victoria was for t' queen, thou sees; and Charlotta for old Lotta Asketh, who is aunt to Joyce's mother. Folks think as old Lotta hes saved a goodish bit of brass in her little shop; and Joyce said 'she wanted a godmother for her daughter as could leave her a hundred pounds or so.' Lotta Asketh was pleased enough; she bought t' child a varry fine christening dress, and as she's a Church of England woman, she wanted it made a Christian of in t' parish church. That pleased Joyce, too; she said 'she always thought the Methodys were a little low.'"

"Why didn't Steve speak up like a man?"

"Thou would hev spoken up, I hev no doubt," answered Jane, with a queer look at Ben, "but Steve isn't thee. He is varry much under his wife, and when she wouldn't ask Sarah to t' christening, he had no way to pay Joyce back but to leave his work and go off on t' tramp for a couple o' days."

"Not ask Sarah to t' christening? Why, thou art mistaken, sure—ly!"

"Nay, I'm not mistaken. Sarah spoke up once to Joyce and told her she didn't care much for hersel, but that Steve

hed made up his mind that t' child should be called after his mother; 'and, Joyce,' said she, 'thou ought to do anything and give up anything, rather than drive Steve away from his work, and into t' habit of wandering about t' woods again.' And Joyce answered, 'she could manage her husband without any of her interference,' and sharper words followed, and the upshot was, Joyce declared 'she'd hev her own way, come what would o' it.' "

"Was Steve at t' christening?"

"Why, for sure. He came home on t' Friday night before t' christening Sunday, and he was that eager to make it up with Joyce that he agreed to all she wanted. Lucy Booth was at Joyce's that night, and she told me how hard Steve begged to hev Sarah invited, but Joyce said 'Sarah worrited her,' and her nerves couldn't stand 'worrying'; besides, Sarah hadn't sent t' little lass a present, and there were plenty of friends that had done so, to fill t' house to t' varry door-step."

"Did thou go to t' christening?"

"Ay, I went to t' church, and there was a big party round t' font, and old Lotta Asketh stood up for t' baby with Joyce's own mother. Old Lotta may leave her a hundred pounds, but she'll niver teach her the Creed and the Collects, not she. There's not a bigger old heathen anywhere than Lotta Asketh."

"Did ta go to t' christening-feast?"

"Ay, I did. There was a grand spread, I can tell thee! It was a knife-and-fork tea—cold chicken and ham, fatty-cakes and cheese-cakes, lemon tartles and sponge-loaves, and spice buns, and other oddments; but Lotta put a sovereign in t' baby's hand, so mebbe it didn't cost them so varry much, after all."

"And Sarah wasn't invited! I'm fair capp'd! Is ta sure?"

"I'm sure enough; and that is what she's fretting about, for thou sees she's a fool over Steve, and pretty nigh as bad over Steve's child. Folks hev talked a deal likewise, and iver since christening Steve he's been off in t' woods. He's a born rover; you'd think he'd come out of a gypsy tent."

"He's a weak, silly, heartless lad, that's what he is. I wonder at Sarah turning a kind word or look his way."

"Ay, but as thou said thysen, Master Holden, women are a queer lot. Mebbe it's a good thing for men that they are so queer."

"Get out wi' thee!—I mean, go back to thy loom. A man wouldn't be so bad off with thee, happen."

Jane laughed, and tossed her pretty head; but Ben did not catch the kindly glance she gave him. He was thinking of Sarah, and of the ungrateful brother for whom she had sacrificed so much of her life. Jonathan heard the story with pity and indignation. He knew, also, that if Steve was doing badly it was all the worse for his own hopes; and he did think it hard that a love as faithful as that he gave Sarah should be constantly put behind the weak, wavering, selfish affection which Steve only used as a claim upon her generosity or her forbearance.

As for Steve and Joyce, Sarah had forgiven them so much that they thought her anger at the christening slight very unreasonable. Joyce, too, soon began to miss her willing hand, and also the generosity with which she had ever been ready to open her purse towards the small, uncalculated demands incidental to house-keeping—the half-pound of butter necessary to tide over the time before Steve's wages were due; the little luxury that an unexpected visitor demanded; the shilling for baby's medicine; the half-crown short of the rent money. She had expected that Sarah would stay away for a week, but when the offended girl made no advances towards a reconciliation, Joyce felt almost injured by her sister-in-law's "unreasonable pride."

She spoke freely to her neighbors about Sarah, for she wanted Sarah to know that *she* was willing to "make it up;" but she would not call and tell her so, because she trusted that Steve's and the baby's influence over her would bring her back to the cottage. But Sarah, like all people who are slow to anger, was stable in her wrath. She had made up her mind to go no more to her brother's house unless she were sent for; and

Joyce, having been informed of this decision, was quite sure "it would be a varry long time ere she sent after Sarah Benson."

So the summer wore unhappily away. Sarah's friends soon understood that she would rather not talk of her brother and his wife, and the young couple were never named in her presence. "While all is well," Sarah thought, "I am only the third wheel on the cart; and if there should be any change for the worse, the news will find me quick enough, I don't doubt."

The news found her only too soon. One night, when she came home from her work, Steve was sitting in her room waiting for her. His appearance gave her a shock. Clothing is so much to a man, and Steve's was dusty and torn and shabby. He had lost entirely that air of a spruce, prosperous young workman which had set off so well his handsome face and trig, slim figure—the tidy suit, the coarse but clean linen, the gay neckerchief tied loosely at the throat, with the ends flying out a little at each side.

"Sarah, my lass, how is ta? I'm glad to see thy face again."

"I'm well, Steve; and I'm glad to see thee. How is Joyce—and Charlotta Victoria?"

"They are badly, varry badly. I hev hed no work for three weeks. Thou knows what that means."

"I do that. But whatever is up with thee? Thou art still working at Chorley's, I hope."

"Na, but I'm not. He's a mean lot. Didn't ta hear he hed packed me off three weeks since?"

"No, I didn't. Why did he do that, Steve?"

"I wish I'd taken thy advice and niver left Burley. Burley were always fair to me, and he knew when he'd got a master-hand, and didn't grudge him a day off now and thin in t' fine weather."

"Oh, Steve, Steve! I'm afeared thou hes been up to thy old tricks again—a man with a wife and child, too. It's too bad of thee, it is that! Thou should think more of them than of t' woods and sea-side. Thou should stick to them summer and winter; thou promised to do so."

"I know I did; and I kept my word, until Joyce sent me off about that unlucky christening. I wanted t' little lass called after thee."

"Don't lay t' blame of thy folly to me. Thou knew right well that thou could not grieve me worse than by leaving thy work and thy home."

"Sarah, can ta lend me a sovereign?"

"Ay, I can, my lad."

"Thou art always kind; I thank thee for it."

"Nobody is more welcome; but, Steve, thou art not going to t' public-house with it, I hope?"

"Nay, I'm not that bad, Sarah. They are wanting coal and bread at home. I'll get it for them, and then I'm off on t' tramp to-morrow to look for work. I couldn't get another job here, thou knows, with both Burley and Chorley against me. Good-by, lass. I'll go far and long, and niver find as true and kind a heart as thine."

And Sarah put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Then he stumbled down the little wooden stair, and she heard his foot-falls die away on the stone pavement outside; and she followed every step with low, broken prayers for a love stronger and wiser than her love to protect and comfort him in all the way he should go.

CHAPTER VI.

STEVE'S FAIR CHANCE.

“Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind we have a foretaste of eternal peace.”

“God's spice we are, and pounding is our due,
For pounding spice both taste and sense doth please.”

HOPE is something more than a blessing, it is a duty and a virtue; and Jonathan, dimly conscious of this fact, kept his heart turned to the light, both as regarded his daughter and Sarah Benson. He knew how essential to his own happiness a regular, well-established groove of life was; and he thought that Eleanor's restlessness and dissatisfaction might well enough arise from the unfamiliarity of the circumstances attending so radical a change as marriage.

The elation and pleasure of her first letters from London delighted him. Like some brilliant bird of passage, she was flitting through the charmed circle which hedged in the splendid majesty of the throne; and he felt all the glow of her social triumph and all the pleasure of her apparent gratification. But the sunshine soon shadowed. In a month she began to complain. “Anthony was jealous of her. He grudged her the full measure of the joy he had introduced her to. He counted up carefully the expenses of the honor she had everywhere done him.” Jonathan took no notice of her complaints. He rather enlarged upon the unexpected enjoyments that had fallen to her lot. He expressed without stint his pride in her, and in her position, and he always spoke of Anthony with respect and admiration.

“Things will rub themselves smooth and right if nobody in-

terferes with them," he thought; and then he called to mind several matrimonial cases where things had rubbed themselves "smooth and right."

Aske had taken the house in London for three months, and the term was rapidly drawing to a close. In the beginning of August Eleanor would be at home again, and he began to look forward to her arrival with a sense of pleasant expectation. One morning he awoke with her name on his lips, and she was his first thought as he opened his eyes. It troubled him that his heart fell with it. It was a hot, sunny day, and he sent the carriage to the park gates, for he determined to walk through the grass and under the trees to meet it. He hoped in the stillness and solitude to find a peace that had somehow slipped away from him in a moment.

But this was just one of those days which the hyper-sensitive mind finds aggressive. Nature was so uncompromisingly green; the grass had such an intense color, the foliage of the beeches and elms and oaks was so lustrous and positive, the vistas of pasture-land so decidedly verdant, that their very certainty seemed to repress thought and induce sadness. He tried to lift himself into a higher atmosphere — into the blue of heaven — but all his efforts were failures; he had that chill presentiment, that stubborn bosom weight, that

"No philosophy can lift."

He looked anxiously at Ben Holden, who was standing at the mill door in his long checked pinafore, with his hands in his pockets, and a general air about him of a comfortable satisfaction with life. Ben said a cheerful good-morning; and Jonathan perceived that all was right among the frames and workers. Then he knew that a fear about Sarah had been at least one element of his depression.

There was a large mail waiting for him, and the topmost letter was one from Eleanor. He lifted and laid it aside until he had attended to every other communication. He expected something disagreeable to come out of that small, smooth, em-

blazoned envelope ; and he was not deceived. Eleanor was in debt, and afraid to tell her husband. She accused him of a stingy unreasonableness. She said he expected her to visit lords and ladies, and yet would not understand that many changes of clothing were necessary for such visits. The end and sum of the complaint was that she needed five hundred pounds to enable her to leave London honorably.

And Jonathan sent her the five hundred pounds at once, though he did not fail to give her with it much salutary advice, for running into debt was one of those social sins he found it hard, under any circumstances, to excuse. By the next post he received his money back, with a sternly polite note from Aske. It was evident that Aske had received the letter intended for his wife, and that he was exceedingly angry at its contents and the revelation of extravagance which it made.

After all, there was something in Aske's note which compelled Jonathan's respect ; yet he waited in great anxiety Eleanor's next letter. It was a few lines of passionate rebellion that made him wretched. She said Anthony had decided to take her to some small German town "to teach her economy and self-restraint ;" and she added, with a touch of that obstinacy which Jonathan understood so well, "If he thinks to conquer Eleanor Aske by isolating her he is very much mistaken." She went to Germany, however, without further resistance, but Aske undoubtedly had the worst of the discipline he had planned for his wife. She no longer complained, she expressed neither content nor discontent, but she convinced him thoroughly that a silent woman who does not eat, and who regards life with a vacant unconcern that nothing can stir, may be ten times more aggravating than the veriest scold.

Jonathan dreaded to see a letter from her, and yet if letters did not come he was restless and anxious, and completely taken possession of by the absent child whom he so dearly loved. So that, if Sarah had her trials and cares during the miserable summer and autumn inaugurated by that unhappy christening, Jonathan's riches did not shield him from very similar ones. Often

during their hot, dusty days he stood watching his frames with a heavy heart, and thinking—"full purse or empty purse, the weft o' life comes through a sorrowful shuttle."

It was in the early part of June when Steve borrowed the first sovereign from Sarah. It had been a little hard for him to make that application; but he felt less at the next one, and it soon became a very common thing for his sister to find him waiting in her room; especially on Saturday afternoon, when she received her wages. For Steve did not succeed in finding work; though he disappeared continually under the pretence of looking for it. He would be absent for three or four days, perhaps a week, if the weather was fine, and then return hungry and penniless, but just as cheerful as if he had been earning his living.

And Joyce, sitting anxious and suffering in her denuded cottage, was angered by his good-tempered indifference; and she made him feel her anger, in all those unequivocal ways at the command of uneducated women. Alas! she did not understand that reproaches never yet brought back the wanderer. For though Steve loved his wife and child in his own fashion, his home had become an unhappy place, and he found it more agreeable to stay away from it than to do his duty and make it happy. Unfortunately, too, he began to meet in his tramps men of the same nomadic tastes as himself, but with far less innocent habits. Sarah trembled when she saw what disreputable characters lounged at the street-corners waiting for him when he paid her his almost regular weekly visit.

"Thou wilt surely get into trouble, Steve, if thou goes with bad company," she said, holding his hand—the hand in which she had just put half of her wage. "Thou art so simple and open-hearted, they'll make a tool of thee, see if they doan't! My dear lad, I doan't like t' look of that man that is waiting for thee."

"He's a real good fellow, Sarah; only he's out of luck, as I am. There isn't a flower nor plant in t' hedge-row he doesn't know all about. I can tell thee, he is better than many a book."

"Still, thou hes no call to share thy money with him. Go home to Joyce; do, my lad."

"Nay, not I; she'll hev a scolding waiting for me. I'm most sure of work next week at Satterley's, and then I'll go to Joyce."

It was one of Steve's peculiarities to be always "most sure" of some good thing "next week." And for a long time Sarah trusted in him. His open face, his frank speech, his positive air of satisfaction, were hard to doubt, especially when she didn't want to doubt them. None are so blind as they who will not see, and long after every one in the village was convinced of Steve's utter worthlessness Sarah continued to expect good from him, and for him.

But one dreary evening in November the full significance of the change which had taken place in her brother's life was revealed to her. She had come home from the mill, weary, cold, and wet, with a bitter indifference in her heart, for she felt as if Happiness had said to her, "*No! no! no!*" until she was full of cold despair. As soon as she entered the door, Martha Crossley said to her, "Here hes been little Polly Sands for thee, Sarah. Joyce sent her."

"What for?" She was removing her wet shoes, and she asked the question listlessly, almost querulously.

"Why, I should think Joyce is in trouble of some kind. Polly said thou wast to go to Steve's cottage as soon as iver ta could."

"Did Joyce send for me? Thou knows I said I'd niver cross her door-stone again until she did."

"It isn't like thee, Sarah, to put 'if' and 'but' in t' way of a kindness. Joyce sent for thee, but happen it is God's message, too, my lass. Thou'l niver say 'No,' I'm sure."

Sarah was crying softly; she could not have said exactly why.

"Take a drink o' tea—it's ready for thee, and make thy feet dry, and then go thy ways. I'll warrant thou willn't be sorry for it."

"Ay, I'll go, Martha"—and having determined to be generous, she made haste to be so. In half an hour she stood within the familiar house-place. A pitiful sight met her. Its best furniture was all gone. There was no fire on the hearth. There was no bread in the cupboard, and Joyce, who was fretful with want and anxiety, was scolding the child crying with hunger on her knee.

"Thou hes wished me ill iver since thy brother married me, Sarah Benson. Now, then, I hev sent for thee to see what thy ill wishes hev brought me to."

Sarah's heart was too full of pity to be angry at the unreasonable woman. She lifted the weeping child, and said, "Nay, then, Joyce, I am thy true friend. What can I do for thee?"

"Get Lotta some bread and milk; t' little lass is fair starving. I'm well used to clemming lately, and I can bear it better."

Sarah had but a few shillings in her pocket, but she spent them freely; and she did not go away until she had made a good fire, and seen mother and child sleeping, after a full meal. During it, Joyce's complaints revealed, without extenuation, the dangerous condition into which her brother had fallen. In this confidence all foolish pride vanished, and the two women, completely reconciled, consulted heartily as to the best way of bringing Steve back to steady work and steady habits. Steady work was the first step, and Sarah determined to go to Jonathan Burley and ask it for him.

It was a painful step for Sarah to take, and in the morning it appeared twice as difficult, for she was under the tyranny of the weather. Monotonous rain filled the air, and saddened and weakened her. The conflict for bare existence, begun before daylight every morning, seemed on this morning almost too hard to bear. She lifted her little tin can and started for the mill. There was a long string of workers before her, and the clattering of their clogs upon the stone pavements hurt her in every nerve. Ben Holden was at the gates, but she did not speak to him, until the looms stopped for breakfast at eight

o'clock. Then she said, "Ben Holden, I want to speak to t' master to-day."

"There's nobody will hinder thee. Is ta in trouble, Sarah?"

"Ay, above a bit. It's about Steve. I hev prayed, and I hev better prayed to God, to keep him in t' right road, and it seems like he is letting t' poor lad get varry far out of it."

"Don't thee reckon to know so much. God lets us go from one side of t' road to t' other and act a good deal as it pleases wersens; but we are *fast tethered to his hand*, after all, my lass; and when we think we are carrying out our own wills, we are carrying out his will too; and we find wersens in t' place he wanted us sooner than we thought for."

"It is all a muddle, Ben. I feel varry near broken-hearted this morning."

"Nay, nay, my lass! Thou mustn't speak in that fashion. And there is nothing mends sooner than a broken heart, if it be a good heart. Thou hed better see Burley about thy brother. T' master will do right; ay, he will that, whether he wants to do it or not."

About ten o'clock Sarah left her loom and went to Jonathan's office. She was the last person whom he expected to see there; and when he said "Come in," in response to her knock, he did not turn to see to whom he had spoken.

"I'm in trouble, and I hev come to you, master."

He lifted his head and looked pitifully at her.

"I'm in trouble, too, Sarah, and I hev been thinking about going to my Master with it; only, a woman's quarrelling and fratching is such a thing to trouble him with. Yet, as he made women, he'll know how to deal with 'em, if any one does. But I'm not thinking of thee, dear lass. How can I help thee?"

"I want thee to take Steve back."

"Nay, nay; I can't do that. If thou was my own dear wife, and asked me to do that thing, I would say 'No' to thee."

"It isn't for my sake, sir. Oh no; not for my sake. Steve is going down t' road to hell as fast as drink and idleness can take him there. Nothing but steady work can give him another

chance. Master, is he to hev t' chance? Not for my sake, master. I'll stand behind thee, so thou can't see me. It's between thee and tha' conscience, now."

"Oh, Sarah! Sarah!"

"Not for my sake, master, for Christ's sake, will ta give Steve another chance?"

"Ay, I will. Twenty chances—seventy times seven chances! Go, my lass, tell him to come back and do his duty, and oh, Sarah! I thank thee—I thank thee for coming."

He stood up, and raised his face full of confidence and light. In a moment—in the twinkling of an eye, one of those mysterious confidences which pass between souls and the Father of Spirits had lifted him into the sunshine. In the act of doing good, a token for good had been granted to him also.

In the enthusiasm of the action he had quite forgotten himself—quite forgotten Sarah. *To do His will*, on earth, even as it is done in heaven! That was the pure and perfect joy that satisfied his soul for the moment. Sarah understood the spiritual exaltation, and she slipped away ere he could mar the gracious act by any thought of earthly approval or reward. She did not go back to work. Ben Holden was in the yard, and she said to him, "Thou must let me off to-day. I'm none fit for my loom."

"Why-a! Whatever's t' matter with thee? T' master niver said 'no' to thy question?"

"He said 'yes' with all his heart. He's a good man. I want to find Steve and tell him t' news; and there is Joyce, poor lass! It would be selfish-like in me not to see her as soon as iver I could get there."

"Go thy ways, Sarah Benson. If there were more women like thee, there wouldn't be so many bad husbands."

"Don't thee say that. Why should men lay their sins on any poor woman? They take their own ill way, most of t' time. It 'ud be just as fair to say, if all men were like thee and t' master, there would be no bad wives."

He had opened the gates as they were talking, and he let

her through with a smile. "There's a deal o' something better than human nature in men and women," he thought; but ere the thought was well formed, it was lost in the necessity for giving Lot Yates "a bit of his mind," for Lot had a deal of something worse than human nature in him, and was beating his horses unmercifully.

In spite of the rain and murky fog full of bits of coal-dust and burned flakes of carbon, in spite of the gutters running with black water, in spite of the sodden, slipshod men and women, Sarah trod the miserable lanes with a light heart. She hastened to Steve's cottage, though she had little hope of seeing him there. Still, Joyce could be comforted, and perhaps some one found who, knowing where Steve was, would go after him. Ere she opened the door, the shrill voice of Joyce, raised in loud, querulous tones, was audible enough; and when she entered, the sight that met her eyes was a painful one. Steve, wet, ragged, and perfectly reckless-looking, was standing upon the hearth-stone, and the once pretty Joyce, almost equally ragged, and in a violent passion, was railing at him in unmeasured terms of reproach and indignation. As Sarah entered, she turned to her, "Ay, come thy ways in, and look at thy brother. Did ta iver see a bigger vagabond than he is? Here he's back home again, and without work, and without a penny; and thou knows t' little one and I were pretty well clemmed to death when thou got us a bit o' bread and meat last night. We were that!"

"Steve, my dear lad."

"Sarah, lass, I'm glad to see thee."

"I hev brought thee good news, Steve. Joyce, be quiet now; all is going to be right and happy again. Master Burley says, 'Tell Steve to come back to his loom.' Thou can start to-morrow morn, Steve."

Joyce threw her apron over her head, and began to cry softly—tears of hope and relief. Steve stood sullen and silent, glancing first at Sarah and then at his worn-out shoes and ragged clothes. She understood his thought. She even divined the kind of repugnance he felt to go back at all to daily work, es-

pecially among the old comrades whom he had so pridefully deserted, and she put her hand on his wet, ragged coat-sleeve, and said, soothingly, "Thou art tired out, and no wonder. Go up-stairs to thy bed, and I'll make thee a bit of warm breakfast; and then thou can sleep for twenty hours, if ta likes to."

"How can I go back to Burley's in such a rig as this?" and he lifted his foot, and looked almost pathetically at his muddy suit of rags.

"Hesn't ta a better suit?"

"Ay, there is one at Jonas Hardcastle's. What good is that, though?"

"Hes ta t' ticket for it?"

"Joyce hes it."

"Varry well. I'll see after things. Thee go to thy bed, and sleep off t' weariness. I'll not let thee go back to Burley's in dirt and rags; thou can be sure o' that."

"There's few lasses as trustable as thee, Sarah. I'm fair beat out, and I'll be thankful to hev a bit o' meat and a bit o' peace."

In half an hour coffee was boiling, and bacon frying, and a comfortable breakfast was soon ready for the tired wanderer. "Now, Joyce, dear lass, take it up-stairs to him, and give him a kiss with it. Thou must make up thy mind to put up with a deal, and to forgive and forget a deal, but Steve is most like t' prodigal in t' New Testament, and thou must go and meet him. Do, lass! do, lass—for Lotta's sake!"

"Bible folks are Bible folks, Sarah. I niver got religion, yet, and I can't frame mysen to act like them. I'm angry at Steve, and I hev reason—"

"To be sure thou hest reasons, plenty o' them. But come, Joyce, t' coffee is getting cold and t' bacon; take them up-stairs to Steve, take them kindly, *do!* All depends on thee, after all. I am going now to get his best suit home."

Into the rain and gloom she went, and when she returned, with the suit in her arms, Joyce and Steve were eating together as happy as two children who had just "made up" a quarrel.

Steve was then ready to make any promise the two women wanted; and, after a happy hour with them, he was left to sleep in the darkened room. Then new shoes had to be bought for him, and Sarah went for them; for the rest, she was hard at work till late at night, patching, washing, and ironing. She had her reward, however, for next morning, when Steve called for her, he was as clean and tidy as a good workman ought to be.

It was something of a trial for him to return to his old place, and Sarah expected he would have to bear many an unpleasant look and gibe. She knew also that Steve was on the alert for offence, and a man in that condition is very apt to get what he is looking for. She dreaded the dinner-hour. The rude jokes, so natural to the men and women, and so pleasantly given and taken as a general thing, had always riled Steve's sensitive nature, and she felt that he was in precisely that temper which appropriates and resents the most innocent freedoms.

As twelve o'clock approached she became heart-sick with fear; but a few minutes before it the master entered the room. He walked straight to Steve's loom, and every eye was upon him. Sarah's hands trembled, her face flushed, and then turned deadly pale, and she could not help but watch the meeting, upon which so much depended.

But if she had known Jonathan better she would have been sure that his visit meant kindness. In fact, the master, having been himself a "hand," knew pretty well the drift of Steve's fears and feelings; nor had he forgotten the gantlet of the noon hour's mirth which Steve might have to run. Ben Holden had said, "Let him have it. It will do him good. He will hear some plain truths that happen he'll hear nowhere else." Jonathan thought differently. "Gibing at a man's faults never yet helped to cure them. It is better to trust than to mock, thou may depend upon it, Ben," he answered.

For, to do a half-kindness, to give a reproachful forgiveness, to season favor with punishment, these were things Jonathan Burley could not do. He had forgiven Steve, forgiven him freely, and he meant to give him a fair chance in every way,

So, in the sight of all, he walked straight to Steve's loom. "I am glad to see thee at thy place again, Steve Benson." He said the words plainly and heartily; and those who could not hear them saw the pleasant look on his face, and saw him put out his hand and give the renegade worker a hearty welcome back.

Undoubtedly Jonathan had a thought of Sarah also in this kind deed. None of our motives ring clear through every depth, and he knew well that any scorn or offence offered to Steve would hurt Steve's sister in a double measure. As he turned from the young man he glanced at Sarah. Her face was radiant. Her eyes like two stars. No words could have thanked him as well. Her evident joy went to his heart like sunshine. He colored brightly in his pleasure, and went out of the room, for that hour, at least, a thoroughly happy man.

CHAPTER VII.

ELEANOR'S FLIGHT.

“And love the offender, yet detest the offence.”

POPE.

“His rod revers'd,
And backward mutters of dissevering power.”

MILTON.

“A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
Burns with one love, with one resentment glows.”

POPE.

IN the serenity and light of that one loving deed Jonathan went joyfully many days. He said no more to Steve, and he did not speak to Sarah, but Steve felt his good-will, and Sarah sung at her work, and looked happy and hopeful again. As it drew near to Christmas, Eleanor wrote confidently of her return to Yorkshire; and as she made fewer complaints, Jonathan trusted she was beginning to find that peace was better than strife.

But while the Askes were lingering in Paris, Eleanor gave birth to her first child, and the necessary delay was prolonged by the sudden death of the babe three weeks afterwards, and by the immoderate grief of the mother, causing a somewhat dangerous relapse in her own condition. Anthony's sorrow and disappointment was also great, but it was modified by some considerations which the bereaved mother could not take into account. The boy had been born on French soil; it was almost a calamity in Anthony's eyes for the heir of Aske to be anything but “born Yorkshire.” Such a thing had never happened before in all the records of the house, and he could not help regarding the child as in some measure a foreigner. Of

course, Eleanor could not be blamed consistently for such an untoward event, and yet he felt as if it was a part of the contradiction of her nature, and that in some way or other she was responsible for the thwarting of his hopes.

Nor was Aske's sentiment one peculiar to himself. The news of his grandson's birth gave Jonathan, at the moment of its intelligence, a thrill of the proudest gratification; but his very next feeling had been one of chagrin that the boy had not been born in the stately home of which he was the heir. Still, his elation was so manifest that Ben Holden did not scruple to say, "Thou holds thy head high this morning, Jonathan. What hes lifted thee up so?"

"I am a grandfather, Ben. Mistress Aske hes a fine son."

"I am right glad it's a boy."

"So am I. My word! Won't Aske be proud? And sure enough, there's Aske's church-bells ringing! They'll hev got the news, too. Poor little chap, to be born in France, of all places in t' world!"

"Ay, it's a pity. Aske won't like it, thou may be sure o' that. Some women, nay, I may well say all women, are so contrary."

"If there was an earthquake, thou would blame women for it, Ben. It sounds spiteful in thee. Thou hed a right good mother, and two good sisters, I'm sure."

"Ay, I hed; but their kind aren't common."

"Be quiet, will ta? They are common enough. Don't thee set thysen up to think thou hed t' only good mother and sisters. Other men hev been just as lucky as thou wert. There's good women in ivery family, and if there's a bad one, like as not she's a good one that hes been spoiled by some bad man's mismanagement. I'll hev to be an out-and-out infidel before I lose my faith i' good women, Ben."

"Let t' subject drop, Jonathan. Thee and me hes other things more important to talk about. There's them white yarns Jeremiah Wade sent — they ought to be sent back to him."

"Then send 'em back ; and see here, shut up t' mill at twelve o'clock, and tell t' hands I'll add half a crown to ivery one's wage this week, for the sake of t' grandson. Bless his soul ! though he is half a foreigner, we must give him a welcome."

In rather less than three weeks the heir of Aske was dead, and regrets of all kinds were such a very mockery that no one spoke them. It was understood that the squire was coming home as soon as his lady was fit to travel, and the local papers made constant allusions to the preparations in progress for their return. One day, towards the end of January, Jonathan was singularly restless. It was not any business anxiety that made him so, for such troubles induced always a kind of quiet self-concentration. He knew that it was an undefined worry about his daughter that disturbed him, and he left the mill early, went home and dressed, and then ordered his carriage for Aske Hall.

His presentiment had been in some measure a true one. Aske and his wife had arrived during the afternoon, and as he entered the large and lofty vestibule he saw Anthony coming down the great stairway in dinner dress. Small and slight as he was, Jonathan could not help being struck with his aristocratic appearance : he had the manner of a man accustomed to the highest peaks of social life, mingled with that calm confidence which comes from inherited considerations. The two men met with sincere emotion and kindness. "I am particularly glad to see you, sir," said Anthony. "I have sent a groom to Burley House with the news of our arrival, but he has hardly had time to get there."

"Nay, I didn't see him. I came on my own order. How is Eleanor, poor lass ?"

"Still weak and fretting. She has been longing to see you."

They had been approaching the drawing-room as they spoke, and when Anthony opened the door Burley saw his daughter ere she had any idea of his presence. The glance filled him with pity. She was dressed in deep mourning, and she lay back wearily in a large chair, with her eyes closed and her

hands dropped listlessly upon her lap. Her sombre garments made the pallor of her face more conspicuous, and Jonathan's eyes were full of tears when he took her to his breast and kissed her.

Yet they had a very pleasant dinner. Aske had much to tell, and he told it well, and Eleanor diversified his narration by her comments. And while they were still at the table, several gentlemen who had heard of the squire's arrival called and joined them, and Eleanor's pale face gathered color and her eyes light, and she said, with an emphasis which delighted all, that "she was glad to be home, and thought no other place half so beautiful."

About eleven o'clock there was quite a merry gathering in the great entrance-hall, where a big fire was sending banners of flame dancing up the wide chimney. Horses and gigs and carriages were being brought from the stables, and the visitors stood, hats in hand, chatting gayly of the coming "hunts" and balls and dinners, of their pleasure in Mrs. Aske's return, reiterating congratulations and compliments.

Jonathan watched his daughter closely as she stood on the rug of skins with one foot on the stone fender, and the blazing fire throwing fitful lights and shadows over her beautiful face and tall, black-robed figure. There was a pathos and languor about her which he had never noticed before, and which might be the result of her sickness and her mourning dress, or might spring from a heart weary with contention, accepting a fate which it deprecated, but could no longer resist.

"But I'll not meddle nor make in Aske's affairs," he thought, as he was driven rapidly home. "I'll not say to Eleanor, 'Is ta happy?' or 'Is ta no happy?' I'll never put a question to her. She looked sad enough, but then a woman that has lost her first baby can't look as if she had it in her arms. It isn't to be expected."

He thought it best, upon the whole, not to go too often to Aske Hall, and to make his visits there at those ceremonial dinners when there was much company, and its domestic life was

hid behind its social obligations. But Jonathan knew his daughter's peculiarities, and even in the atmosphere of feasting, and amid the ripple of conversation, love has quick eyes. He saw below the surface, and he divined the heart-burnings and disappointments which he would scarcely admit or give a name to, even in his inmost consciousness.

One night in March—a cold, clear, frosty night—he was sitting alone by his fireside. His dinner had been highly satisfactory, and he was serenely smoking his second pipe. The thought in his heart was Sarah Benson. He could see that his last effort to save Steve had not been altogether successful. During the Christmas week the restless man had renewed his old habits, and ever since the hard struggle to keep him at work had been manifest to Jonathan in Sarah's anxious face. That very day Steve's loom had been silent and vacant, and though he had taken no notice of the fact, Sarah's downcast eyes, and the hot flush that suffused her face when he entered the room, told him how severely she felt the shame of Steve's absence.

As he sat still, he was wondering what was the best thing to do in the case, for he had no thought of giving it up. Had he not said, "until seventy times seven?" And he knew well that, before he could hope to bring Sarah to his own home, there must be some certain prospect for the brother whom she conceived herself bound to watch over, not only because she loved him, but because she had kissed the promise to do so upon her mother's dying lips.

The room was still and light, its atmosphere such as befitted the handsome, thoughtful, middle-aged man, sitting so calmly smoking amid its manifold luxuries. Suddenly the door was quickly opened, and Eleanor, in a passion of weeping, flung herself at his feet, and laying her hand on his breast, sobbed out, "Oh, father! father! father! Anthony—struck me!"

Then Jonathan dashed his pipe upon the hearth, and shattered it to pieces. He raised the weeping woman in his arms, and he whispered fiercely below his breath, "I'll horsewhip him for it!"

The natural man, and the unpolished, uneducated man, asserted himself at this crisis, and would not listen to reason. "Go thee back to thy old rooms," he said, sternly; "thou shalt never enter Aske Hall again. If that is t' way fine gentlemen treat a woman like thee, why, they won't try it twice on my lass, that's all about it."

If Aske had struck him he could have borne it better; for, as he told himself, "I would hev given him such a threshing as would hev brought him down to his right place varry quick." But he could imagine no circumstance which would excuse such an outrage on his daughter.

When he came to his breakfast-table in the morning Eleanor was waiting for him. She looked so sweet and fair that it was delightful to see her again making out his coffee; and he felt his heart thrill with a fierce sense of triumph over his son-in-law.

"Whatever did ta do to him, Eleanor, to make him lift his hand to thee?" he asked.

Her bright eyes scintillated, and with a shrug of her shoulders, she looked steadily at her father, and answered with an inimitable air of mockery, "*I laughed at him.*" And under the fascination of her eyes and manner Jonathan set down his cup, and echoed the laugh whose image was on her face. He might have then understood how a man of Anthony Aske's passionate temper had been laughed into an irritation that was almost irresponsible. But he would not permit himself to listen to any suggestion that would excuse Aske's offence.

After reading his mails at the mill he called in Ben Holden. "Ben," he said, as he planted himself squarely on the hearth-rug—"Ben, my daughter came back to me last night."

"Does ta mean she has left her husband?"

"Ay, I do."

Ben walked to the window and looked out. After a minute's reflection, he turned to Burley and said, "Send her home, Jonathan."

"I'll not. Why—a—Aske struck her!"

"I'll be bound she deserved it."

For in Ben's opinion Aske had committed no very heinous offence. Englishmen had a legal right to chastise their disobedient wives; and if Solomon had extended the rod to them as well as to the children, Ben would have had a much higher opinion of him as the wisest of men.

"Still, I say, send her home," he added.

"Thou may give good counsel, but I'm none fool enough to take it."

"Mind this, Burley, them that pick a quarrel wi' Aske will get more than they bargain for. The Askes are a fell lot. Squire Anthony is little, but ivery bit o' that little is Aske."

"I hev a good cause to quarrel wi' him."

"Thou art angry now, and thou is telling lies to thysen. Leisure a bit, and see what Aske will say about his wife. I'll warrant he hed a good cause to quarrel wi' her."

"I won't; not I."

"Thou won't do right, and thou won't take wrong. Varry well. Thou is ravelling a bonny hank for thysen to loosen. Of course, thou is big enough to give Aske a threshing, if ta likes to do it; but in ivery other way Aske is far more than a match for thee."

"That is to try yet."

"Dear me! They say when owt goes wrong i' families the devil blesses himsen; he would be busy enough last night. Is ta going ta keep him busy? Take my advice now, if ta niver takes it again, and send Mistress Aske to her own home. Thou hes no business at all to harbor her."

"Hevn't I? We'll try that. I won't send her home, niver!"

"Then send for Aske and hev it out wi' him. I'll be bound he's varry little to blame."

"I won't do it."

"Then write for him."

"Not I—not a line."

"Then tak' thy own way. What did ta ask me about it for? Did ta think because I took thy wages I would tell thee to do

what is both wrong and foolish? Thou might hev known Ben Holden better."

"Don't thee quarrel wi' me now, Ben. I hev trouble enough without that one."

"Say no more, Jonathan. Thou art sure to do right in t' long run. Did ta notice Steve Benson was away again yesterday?"

"Ay, I did. I don't know whatever's to be done to save t' lad. If thou art spoiling to be giving good advice, Steve is needing it badly, Ben; and happen he'll take it better than me."

The quarrel between Anthony and his wife had risen about such a trifle as the wearing of a sapphire necklace; but, as it usually happens, the apparent trifle represented things far more important. On that night they were going to Squire Bashpoole's to dinner. The squire was Anthony's uncle on his mother's side, and before his marriage Aske had been a very frequent visitor at Bashpoole Manor House, and there had been a general opinion that he intended to marry his cousin, Jane Bashpoole. That young lady had also been a great favorite with Anthony's mother, and had understood from her that she was to inherit the sapphire set which was among the Aske jewels.

But if Anthony had one opinion about the estate more fixed and prominent than any other, it was the idea of keeping intact whatever belonged to Aske as a family property. Of the house, the land, the timber, the plate, the jewels, he was only a steward for those who should succeed him. The young lady's claim was no clearer than a supposition, grounded probably upon her own strong desire; and Squire Bashpoole thoroughly agreed with his nephew in his reluctance to alienate any portion of the family belongings. And though "Cousin Jane" had been prevailed upon to accept a similar necklace as a gift from Cousin Anthony, she still felt the Aske sapphires to be a painful subject; and it had required tact, as well as generosity, on Anthony's part to atone for his apparent niggardliness.

Indiscretion was not one of Anthony's failings, but it had happened that in some hour of post-nuptial confidence the young husband had told Eleanor of the dispute. Perhaps he hoped the knowledge would induce her to forego the pleasure of wearing them under circumstances when they would be likely to annoy the disappointed claimant. The hope was neither extravagant nor unnatural, and hitherto Eleanor had scrupulously regarded it. But on that unfortunate day a series of small domestic annoyances had wrought her into a most provoking mood of mingled mockery and defiance. When she was nearly dressed Anthony came to hurry her movements, and, as men are apt to do, he enforced his wishes with a sweeping condemnation of the unpunctuality and unreliability of women.

Her jewel-case was open, and on the topmost tray the sapphire set sparkled. Her eyes fell upon it as Anthony spoke, and the devil prompted her answer, "I am ready if you will clasp my necklace."

"Not that, Eleanor! Not that necklace, certainly!"

"I intend to wear this and no other."

"I have told you that my cousin Jane wanted it."

"Very impertinent and greedy of her!"

"And to wear it to Bashpoole would be an insult, not only to her, but also to my uncle and aunt."

"Nevertheless, I shall wear it."

"You shall not."

"I beg your pardon, I shall!"

She stood defiantly before him in her rich black satin gown, with the glinting stones in her hand. Her beauty was so compelling, his admiration of her so deep, and his love for her so great, that almost under any other circumstances he would have acknowledged her right to order her own toilet. But he could not insult his nearest kin and lose the friendship of two generations for the wearing of a necklace, and he told her so in plain and positive terms.

She answered him by a scornful mimicry of the words, "*my cousin Jane!*" and a ripple of contemptuous laughter. Then

she lifted the jewels to her white throat herself, and Anthony caught her hands and took them from her. This act of authority was followed by an angry dispute, and finally Eleanor declared that Aske had struck her hand, and she lifted the sapphires and flung them from her with passionate hate and scorn. They were scattered hither and thither, and Anthony, troubled beyond measure at the whole dispute, stooped to gather up the precious fragments. In that interval Eleanor went down-stairs, and finding the carriage waiting, entered it, and gave the order "to Burley House."

At first his wife's escapade did not much trouble him. He sent an apology to Bashpoole, and sat down in his private parlor to calm and collect his thoughts. On the return of the coachman he was satisfied that she had gone to her father, and he believed Jonathan Burley would at once bring her back to her home and duty. When it got so late that he was forced to abandon this hope for the night, he still never thought of blaming Jonathan. He supposed that Eleanor had been either too sick or too angry to reason with, and that he had judged it better for all parties to "take counsel of their pillows."

All the next day he walked restlessly about, listening to every footstep, straining his eyes to catch the first sight of Jonathan's carriage coming through the park. When the night fell he could hardly believe in the disappointment of the day. That his wife would really desert him and go back to her father was too improbable, too dreadful an idea to even give form to. It did indeed creep like an icy, black shadow across his thoughts at intervals, but he put it angrily and positively away. A disgrace of that kind he felt it impossible to contemplate; besides, he loved Eleanor. Uneasy as life was with her, it would be intolerably empty without her.

Another day went anxiously by in watching, waiting, hoping, and fearing. He began to be angry with Burley. If he was unable to make his daughter do right, he thought he should have come to Aske and discussed the situation with him. The third day he could endure the suspense no longer. He wrote

to Eleanor and sent a groom with the letter, directing him to wait for the answer. The letter was short, but very much to the purpose:

“**MY DEAR WIFE**,—Will you please to return home at your earliest convenience? If you will tell Simmonds when you will be ready, I will come with the carriage for you.

“Your loyal husband,

“**ANTHONY ASKE.**”

The few words touched the recreant wife. She knew how much Anthony must have suffered ere he condescended to write them, and her heart went out to meet her husband. Now, when a woman is led by her heart she is very seldom led wrong. Eleanor's first instinct was to sit down and write, “Come at once, dear Anthony.” But, instead of obeying it, she began to reason, and so got to floundering in a quagmire of suppositions.

She told herself that this was a crisis in her matrimonial affairs, and that if she “gave in” too easily, the whole battle might be to fight over again. She concluded that if Aske loved her well enough to humble himself so far, he would go further; far enough, indeed, to render his future subservience to her will a certainty. An answer which would bring about such a desirable result was difficult to compose. No answer was better than a blundering one, for silence neither asked too much nor surrendered too much. She resolved upon it.

“There is no answer,” said a servant to the waiting groom; but oh! what a sad, troubled face watched him galloping down the long avenue with the unkind message. If Anthony could only have seen the wistful eyes with their one great tear welling from their troubled depths, he would have needed no other message. “No answer, sir.” The words smote him like a buffet, and brought the hot blood into his face, and made his heart tremble. He had no idea of such persistence of angry temper in Eleanor, and he felt sure that her father was encouraging her disobedience.

So he wrote to Burley. He explained the cause of dispute,

and requested him to send his daughter back to Aske without further delay ; " it would avoid trouble and scandal." Jonathan always answered his letters promptly and fully, and he went round no bush with his son-in-law.

" Eleanor has been unhappy for nearly two years," he said. " She has come back to my house for shelter and protection, and, please God, I'll give it to her as long as I have a roof to cover her, or an arm to shield her. A man that will strike a woman isn't fit to live with a woman ; and by what I can hear and understand, my lass was struck for a very little thing. It is a poor go if she can't dress herself as she wants to, and it always seemed to me as if she did her duty uncommon well that way. I never asked her to come home, far from it ; but I won't turn her out of her old home, nor I won't send her back to Aske. That's all about it, and I am thine as thou wishes it,

" JONATHAN BURLEY."

On the receipt of this letter, Aske rode over to Burley Mills at once. The interview began badly. He offered his hand on entering, and Jonathan refused it.

" Nay," he said, " I'd rather not. It's happen t' varry hand that struck my Eleanor."

" Let me explain, sir."

" For sure—if ta can."

Then Aske went over the whole story of the sapphires ; adding that, in the climax of the dispute he might have struck his wife's hand. " She said so, but he was too much excited to be certain of anything ; and, indeed, he was inclined to think they were both without clear recollection of what passed."

" I don't think any better of thee, Aske, for trying to sneak out of a fault that-a-way. It would be a deal more manly to say, ' I struck my wife when I was in a passion, and I'm 'shamed of mysen for it.' And, let me tell thee, thou hast far o'ermuch to say about thy cousin, Jane Bashpoole. It's likely thy wife is a bit jealous of her, and Eleanor's feelings ought to be more to thee than thy cousin Jane's and all of t' Bashpoole lot together."

"I made what apology seemed most truthful to me, Burley; and I am the last man in the world to sneak out of any quarrel. If you push me too far you will find that out."

"Thou can't frighten me, Aske."

"I don't want to frighten you. Will you send my wife home?"

"Nay, then I won't!"

"You are harboring a wrong, sir; and I could force you to do right."

"Could ta? Do it, then. I'm harboring thy wife. If she's 'a wrong,' thou made her one. And as for forcing me to do anything I don't want to do, try it. Thou will find thou has got t' wrong bull by t' horns."

"I say your conduct is shameful, sir; ungentlemanly and unfatherly."

"I say thou art a liar. I say it again and again! Strike me with that whip thou art fingering if ta dares to. I'll break it to bits o'er thee if ta does."

Fortunately, at this juncture Ben Holden entered. In fact, Ben had been hanging round, fearful of the very thing which had happened, and quite determined at all risks to save his friend from disgracing himself by a physical attack on a man little more than half his size and weight. He put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder, and said, "Master Burley, mind what thou art doing. Squire, will ta be kind enough to take thysen away as soon as possible? It will be t' best for both of you."

"One word more, Burley—send my wife home."

"She was my daughter long before she was thy wife; she shall stay with me if she wants to."

At these words Aske left the room. He was white as ashes, but no one could doubt the enmity and rage which he veiled beneath his calm exterior. "He is in for a hard fight, Jonathan," said Ben; "and I'm feared we are none able for him."

"Fight, indeed! There's none in him."

"Thou wilt find out thou art much mistaken. They will need to hev long arms that fight Aske, and a long patience, and

a long purse. T' Askes hev been in Airedale since King Stephen's time, and nobody iver got the better of them yet."

" Wheniver there is a Job in trouble, he'll find plenty of thy kind o' comforters. Let me alone, Ben. I hev done right, and I know it."

" Thou hes done wrong, and thou knows it. Go thee after Aske, and make friends with him; and send Madame Aske to her proper place, and save thysen and iverybody round thee lots o' sorrow and shame."

" Dost ta think I'm such a coward as that?"

" Nay, but it would be t' bravest thing iver thou did. And I tell thee, coward or no coward, thou can't fight Anthony Aske."

" I'll try to, anyway. So now, Ben, be quiet with thee. Thou can be a wise man, and a brave man, if ta wants to, and look out for thysen."

" Thou knows better than that. Thou knows I'll stick to thee, right or wrong, good or bad, to t' varry last."

CHAPTER VIII.

ANTHONY ASKE'S REVENGE.

“ Revenge is but a frailty incident
To crazed and sickly minds; the poor content
Of little souls, unable to surmount
An injury; too weak to bear affront.”

OLDHAM.

“ Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils.”

MILTON.

It is a finer thing to conciliate an enemy than to conquer one; but Jonathan Burley did not make any such consideration. He felt himself to have “bested” his son-in-law, and he kept reiterating that “he was not afraid of him.” What could Aske do to him? He did not believe there was law enough in England to make Eleanor live with her husband if she did not want to do so. True, Aske might divorce her; but the irate father answered the thought promptly. “Let him do it! He’ll hev to give her back her money, and she’ll get a better husband, easy enough. And as for what folks say—*that* for it,” and he snapped his fingers defiantly at the supposed gossip.

The day had been a wretched one to the undutiful wife; and she had almost determined to tell her father she would go back to her husband and her own home. But the first words Jonathan said convinced her that her repentant resolution had come too late.

“ Aske was at t’ mills to-day, Eleanor.”

“ What did he say?”

“ What did he say? I hardly know, I was that mad at him;

but I know what I said. I called him a liar, a double liar; and I told him thou niver should go back to him; and I dared him to do his worst to me."

"Oh, father! father! I am so sorry."

"Sorry? What's t' matter now, pray? I thought that was what thou wanted."

"I—I don't know."

"Well, if iver! Thou caps all t' women I have come across. Now mind, Eleanor! Thou can't play fast and loose wi' thy father. Thou brought thy quarrel to me, and I hev lifted it; and I mean to fight it out. And make up thy mind to another thing—Anthony Aske hes turned his back on thee forever; and thou'l just hev to lay upon t' bed thou hes made for thysen."

"Father, I hev you, and there is nobody so loving and so true as you are."

"Now thou talks sensible. We got along as happy as could be before that fellow came between us, and we can do without him varry well indeed for t' future."

She stooped and kissed her father for answer, and he held her white jewelled hands and stroked them fondly, and felt again very decidedly that he had "bested" his enemy. Still, as the sweet spring days went by there was a weight upon them. Eleanor was loving and lovely, and she gave to Jonathan's life the sweet womanly flavor he always longed for, but the joy of her presence was like the joy of forbidden pleasure or the sweetness of stolen fruit.

And Anthony Aske's vengeance did not tarry. Jonathan had thought over his own ground carefully, and he had not been able to find any vulnerable place in his life for Aske's attack, excepting through Eleanor, and he imagined he was well prepared on that side. Nor did Anthony at first see in what precise way his father-in-law was to be ruined. But if there was a man in Yorkshire who was able to open his eyes to whatever advantages he had, his lawyer, Matthew Rhodes, was that man, and the very next morning he drove into Leeds to see him.

Rhodes was a very large man; he had an eye like the eagle's,

piercing and yet cold ; and a neck and head thick and aggressive as a bull's. He was a close and eager partisan, and a good fighter for any cause he espoused. Indeed, he loved a desperate fight, and had been frequently known to defend a criminal whose case appeared to be hopeless for the simple delight such forlorn legal struggles gave him.

"Good-morning, squire," he said ; "what can I do for you to-day?"

"I have a quarrel on hand, Rhodes. I want you to fight with me."

"Hum ! Who is it with, squire ? And what is it about ?"

"It is with Jonathan Burley."

Then Rhodes became interested at once. "Your father-in-law, squire ?"

"Exactly. It is about my wife. Listen !" and Anthony went over the whole affair, carefully.

"Do you want a divorce ?"

"No, no, no ! I will not give up my wife."

"There is her dowry, you know, and—"

"I am not thinking of money."

"Is it revenge, then ?"

"Yes ; it—is—revenge ! I want to ruin Burley."

"You are sure you mean it ? Quite sure, squire ?"

"I never was more in earnest about anything."

"Are you afraid of spending money for this object ?"

"No. I'll spend it freely."

"Hundreds ?—thousands ?"

"Tens of thousands, if necessary."

"Then I understand you. Leave me for an hour to think it over, when you come back, and I will tell you what to do."

When Aske returned Rhodes had entered fully into his client's quarrel. Indeed, he had wrought himself so completely to Anthony's mood, that Burley had become almost personally offensive to him. The squire felt the accord at once, and the two men sat down together.

"You have been badly treated, Aske—shamefully treated, disgracefully treated, by both Burley and his daughter."

"Leave my wife out of the question. I prefer that she should not be named."

"Very well; Burley ought to be punished—severely punished. To come between a man and his wife is a crime, squire; and I'm sorry the law finds no adequate punishment for it. There is no adequate punishment, so we must take the law somewhat in our own hands; and I think we can make Burley smart. Yes, I really think we can! If I remember right, he bought the land on which his mill stands from your father?"

"Yes, he did."

"And the land above it is still yours?"

"Both above and below."

"Never mind that which is below. You own the land above it, as far up the stream as Black Force?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then build a mill upon it. Build as large a mill as you can, and fill it with the newest and finest machinery."

"I see what you mean, Rhodes; but I don't want to meddle with trade and spinning. I am a county gentleman, and my ancestors—"

"I want you to do nothing the 'ancestors' will object to. You need not appear at all. I know the man who will attend to the business for you."

"But that would be a mere question of competition; and it is likely Burley would have the best of it. He is clever in business, and he has the reputation of being clever. Everything is in his favor. I do not believe I could injure him in that way; and I might injure myself."

"Squire, you don't see as far through a stone wall as I thought you could," and he stooped forward and said a few words in a lower voice to Anthony.

Then the squire leaped to his feet with a laugh. "Thank you, Rhodes," he cried; "the plan is capital. No one but you would ever have dreamed of such a revenge."

"But my thoughts must depend on your money."

"Draw upon me for all you require; and, remember, I am impatient. Do not lose an hour."

"It isn't my way. You can go home, squire; you will not have long to wait for the declaration of war."

Rhodes kept his word. Within a week a large force of men had begun to dig the foundations for another mill, higher up the stream than Burley's. Jonathan winced at the coming competition; but he had not, during the months it was in process of erection, any idea of the deeper wrong that was to follow.

But it was bad enough to see the edifice growing as rapidly as unstinted money and labor could produce it; and it soon became an almost intolerable eyesore to him. Aske never appeared in the new enterprise. A man from Halifax, called Sykes, was the nominal proprietor; but Burley knew well whose money and power was behind him. And Sykes, too, was a blustering, hectoring fellow, whose manner was especially offensive to Jonathan—a very Mordecai passing his mill-gates.

When the new mill-building was completed it was filled with machinery and looms of the best description; and such high wages were offered to first-class hands as speedily robbed Burley of most of his fine workers. Almost every day there was some irritation of this kind; and the rivalry between the two masters—Burley and Sykes—soon began to infect all their hands; so that the "letting out" every night was a turbulent scene of ill words, too often ending in blows. And it was not many weeks before a spirit of hatred and quarrelling entered every cottage, and in some cases separated friends and families.

At this point Aske's real motive was manifested. One morning a large body of men were observed at work upon the stream. They were engaged in building a lock. Burley was naturally very indignant. Sykes, in his insolent way, said "their machinery would at times need more water than the ordinary 'run' would afford; and in such circumstances they would be obliged to 'lock' the water for a supply."

"That will allow you at any time to shut off my supply of

water, and so virtually to stop my mill. It is an outrage! You have no right to 'lock' a mill-stream," said Burley, passionately, "and I will appeal to the law to protect me."

"And if the law orders me to remove the 'lock' I will do it. Not till," answered Sykes, turning on his heel indifferently.

But going to law was a remedy as bad as the disease; and Burley began to perceive that it was exactly what Aske had been driving him to. For Aske knew well that he had no right to "lock" a mill-stream; and he knew also that the law would not sustain him in such an act; but all the same, during the trial of the case—which might be indefinitely prolonged—Burley could be effectually and permanently crippled in business.

Months of terrible anxiety followed. Burley, deprived of reliable water-power, found himself unable to fill orders with any degree of punctuality. The prosecution of his case took all his spare time and money. He was going to financial ruin at a frightful pace. Every small loss paved the way for a great one; and he foresaw that when his verdict was gained he would be a ruined man. True, he could then sue Aske for damages; but, weary and impoverished, how would he be able to go through another prolonged litigation.

At first the wicked injustice of the whole scheme for his ruin almost made him insane. He went about his mill like a baited wild beast; there were hours when even Ben Holden kept out of his way. All the worst points of Jonathan's character were developed by such an ordeal, for he had a distinct under-consciousness that it was of his own bringing on; that he had wilfully taken a bad road; and that just so long as he chose to pursue it, he need not expect to meet with any good.

He saw the business of which he was so proud, which he had built up by years of industry and prudence, decreasing day by day. No amount of skill or intelligence or caution could avert its decay. He loved his money. Every shilling of it had been honestly made, and was a testimony to his integrity. He felt keenly that he was being "rogued out of it" with a slow, implacable persistence that he could neither resist nor escape. All

his life's labor was going at a sacrifice, and his foes hid themselves behind the bulwark of the law, and from that vantage-ground baited him into an agony of imprudent struggles against the iniquity of their injustice.

In a very short time after the lawsuit began it usurped every faculty and feeling of Jonathan's nature. He had no time for anything but the unnatural fight upon which he had entered. He resigned his management of the chapel affairs, and soon became irregular in all those public religious duties which had once been such a delight to him. Ben watched the mill with a vigilant eye, but in spite of every effort the number of looms at work gradually decreased. Jonathan could not bear to see it, and he seldom went through the weaving-sheds.

Even the sympathy of his "hands," manifesting itself in a subdued manner, or by a more marked respect, hurt him. Besides, Sarah's face was a reproach he could not meet. In a moment's passion he had taken his daughter home and espoused her quarrel, and he quickly understood that by the act he had put another barrier between Sarah and himself. In all his subsequent proceedings he had also sacrificed her to the evil passions which were eating his own heart and substance away. As time went on he avoided her altogether. He had a dim kind of perception that Steve was doing very badly, but he did not feel as if he had either the right or the inclination to interfere again in his affairs. One day Ben Holden began to speak of him, and he stopped the subject with a few curt words.

"Let Steve Benson alone, I say. When he works, pay him. When he's idle, 'dock' him. We are both going to ruin about as fast as we can; only he tak's one way, and I tak' another."

"If ta knows thou art going to ruin, for God's sake stop, Jonathan."

"Nay, I'm in for t' fight. I'll hang on till t' last moment. Does ta think I'd back out of any fight? I'm not that kind."

"I wish ta was."

"Well, I am not."

But even the men in the thick of the battle are not to be

half so much pitied as the women who sit at home, watching, watching, watching for some good coming ; and weeping, because there is nothing comes but disappointment and despair. Of all the sufferers in this unhappy quarrel, Eleanor was the greatest. Certainly her father never said a word of reproach to her. But words are not the only form of speech. His gloomy, haggard face, his restlessness and silence ; the gradual but constant retrenchments in the once splendidly generous household, taught her better than any lecture could have done some forcible lessons regarding wilful sin and its consequences.

The old home, which she had looked back so fondly to, had become a very different place. It was so, indeed, from the first hour of her return. Nature, even in the household and the affections, abhors a vacuum ; and as soon as Eleanor married, she began to efface her place in Burley House, and order it to new ways and new hopes. Jonathan had got used to his solitary dinner, and his quiet sit with his pipe. There were very few hours in which he really regretted the company, and the dressing, dining, and merry-making which had been naturally enough a part of Eleanor's reign there.

Also, he had begun to picture to himself another woman in her place as mistress. Into all his fair, large rooms he had brought Sarah, in imagination. Her quiet movements, her calm, sweet face, her soft, homely speech, had become a part of all his dreams and hopes for the future. Do as he would, Eleanor appeared to him somewhat in the light of a guest. She had given up her place, and he could not put her in it again. Aske's wife was not altogether the same thing as his very own daughter. He would have been puzzled to define the difference ; he would, very likely, have denied it ; but there it was.

And Eleanor, in the same vague, indeterminate way, was sensible of it. Her rooms were precisely as she left them, but she had outgrown all their belongings. She wondered she had ever cared for the books on the shelves. The pretty furniture appeared childish in its taste, and paltry in its quality, after the splendor of her apartments in Aske Hall. She could not help

a feeling of contempt for the mementos of the very days that in her memory had been bathed in a rosy light.

So that in the earliest hours of her wicked desertion from duty, she felt that she had made a grave mistake. But alas! alas! how hard are the backward steps to a forsaken home! And after her father's open defiance of Aske, the road seemed barred to her. She was powerless to struggle against the forces, internal and external, that bound her to her transgression. Then she made an effort to resume her old place in Burley House, and among the society which she had been wont to gather there. But she was no longer a bright young girl surrounded by lovers, with the glory of a high social position before her. She was a deserted wife, with a shadow upon her name.

In the heyday of her youth and beauty and prosperity, she had not been very careful of other women's feelings, and she did not find them in her trouble inclined to return good for evil. Very few ladies called upon her. The gentlemen she met treated her with restraint and evident disapproval, or else with a sympathy that was still more painful and offensive.

It was Jane Bashpoole's hour of revenge, and she used it pitilessly against her rival. The story of the sapphire necklace, set in Miss Bashpoole's own designing, passed from lip to lip. "Poor Cousin Anthony" was the subject of her commiseration, and without a dissenting feminine vote Eleanor was adjudged unworthy of the love and position which he had given her. And though Squire Bashpoole said few words about the matter, every single word, and every shrug of his broad shoulders, condemned his nephew's wife. And the county gentlefolks wondered "how Aske could expect anything else from people who had only their money to recommend them, and who had not been taught through generations of culture the self-restraints of good birth and good breeding."

A month after the quarrel began, Aske left Yorkshire; but the work of his revenge went steadily on. Still, few things grow desperate at once. For months, Burley had intervals in which he not only disregarded but defied his enemy. "He'll

get more than he's building for, Ben," he would say, after an unusually prosperous week. "If he thinks he can take my business from me, he's a bit mistaken! Who's Sykes of Halifax? Nobody knows him. Jonathan Burley, he's a good name from t' Tweed to t' Thames."

But, from the hour in which Aske's tactics developed themselves in the "locked stream," Jonathan plainly foresaw his financial ruin; and the conflict resolved itself into that desperate, despairing pertinacity which makes soldiers hold a fort they know must finally be surrendered; or doctors struggle with a cancer they are certain will, in the end, destroy life.

It was the facing of this hopeless fight which made Burley hard and parsimonious. He wanted every shilling to continue it as long as possible, and he began retrenchment first in his home. All his horses were sold but the one roadster he needed for his gig; all the servants dismissed but such as were absolutely necessary to prevent things from going to waste. Eleanor, who was fond of luxurious appointments, and especially of rich clothing, found it no light addition to her sorrows to learn the want of money, and to be compelled to fold over her aching heart faded and shabby silk.

One night, nearly three years after she had left Aske, Eleanor was standing at the window just at gloaming. It was the month of March, and the ground was white, and the trees restlessly tossing their bare branches above the neglected avenue. All was still in the house, all was still in the park, except the cawing of the rooks, sailing homeward in straggling flight. Never had Eleanor been so conscious of the punishment of her sin as during that dreary day. Her father, full of trouble and anxiety, had gone to York, and had forgotten to bid her "good-by." She had long felt that she was a trouble to the two women-servants, and that they heartily wished her in her own home. All outside sympathy for her was long ago dead. She was utterly forsaken and forlorn.

She was weeping silently, and almost unconsciously, when the house-maid, a woman of forty years old, entered the room

with coals to replenish the fire. Eleanor's white cheeks and hopeless air made the woman sorry for her. She set down the empty scuttle, and said, "Mistress Aske, I am grieved for thee. Why doesn't thou go and mak' up with thy husband? Depend upon it, he'll niver be able to say a cross word to thee."

"Oh, thank you, Martha! You are the only person that has had a kind word for me for so long! I would go to the squire if I knew where he was. I think I would go to the end of the world if I could only put an end to this trouble."

"Nay, then, thou need only go to thy own place. T' squire came home yesterday; and varry old and bad he looks, so Jane Arkroyd says. I'd tell Jimmy to drive thee oover to Aske, and for thy own sake and for Master Burley's sake, I'd try and put a stop to a' this worritting and waste o' good brass."

"I have a great mind to take your advice, Martha. I am sure it is good advice. But I won't have Jimmy. If I go, no one but you shall know; then, if I fail, I am sure you will keep my fresh sorrow and shame in your own heart."

"I don't believe thou will fail; and if ta does, I'll niver say a word about it to any one. Thou can't walk to Aske, though, and in t' dark, too."

"Yes, I can. It is only four miles over the common. Many an afternoon I walk double that, without any motive but to tire myself to sleep. I'll go now, Martha; I won't wait until to-morrow. It may be wet then, and a day may make all the difference between too late and not too late."

She dressed carefully, and covered herself with one of the large mantles then worn. In a little more than an hour she was at the gates of Aske Park. It was quite dark and the gates were shut, and she had no alternative but to ring the bell and take old Geoffrey into her confidence. He listened to her with reluctance. "T' squire will never forgive me, mistress," he said, "and I doan't think it kind in thee to put an owd man like me in such a box."

"But let me warm myself at your fire, Geoffrey. I am damp and cold."

He was not able to resist this plea, and when he saw how three years of suffering had changed her, his heart was troubled for the woman he had first seen in all the pride and joyousness of her bridehood.

"I won't harm you, Geoffrey. I only want to see my husband—to see if there is any chance of him forgiving me."

"Now then, mistress, thou talks well. Go thy ways, and God bless thee!"

She walked rapidly through the park, and as she neared the house she saw that there were lights in the small dining-parlor. The blinds were not drawn, but before the windows there was a clump of thick laurel-trees. It was Anthony's custom, when he dined alone, to smoke his cigar on the terrace before the drawing-room, and she meant to watch behind the shrubs until he came out. Then she could approach him unseen by the servants, and she thought that if Anthony was left without anything to consider but the forgiveness she meant to plead for, he would not turn her away.

Cautiously she advanced to the laurel-bushes, and peered through them into the room. Matthew Rhodes was sitting with Aske. They were smoking and talking with great earnestness. The table was covered with papers, and Eleanor observed her husband's face darken as he examined them. She guessed rightly enough that they were bills of expenses, and probably their amount staggered even Anthony's conception of the value of such a revenge as he was taking; for he soon rose, and began to walk about the room in a mood whose concentrated passion she was quite familiar with. Rhodes terrified her. She had never seen the man before, but she had heard many a story of his relentless persecution of those whom he hated, and his dark, heavy face made her shrink back trembling into the covert of the laurels. She did not dare to call Anthony's attention while Rhodes was near him. Shivering with cold and sick with fear, she waited and waited until the two men went out of the room together.

Perhaps Anthony might come on to the terrace now. She

lingered for another half-hour, until she had no longer any strength or courage left. Then, with slow and painful steps, she went back to the keeper's lodge. He let her in without a word; and she stood a few minutes by his fire, and dried and warmed her wet, cold feet. Her wretched face, her pallor, and silent, heavy weeping, commanded his pity. He asked her no questions, but quietly put a cup of milk and a slice of bread-and-meat on the table. With a look of gratitude she drank the milk, and then, weeping bitterly, went out again into the dark, and so across the lonely common dividing Aske from Burley on the northern side.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE SHADOW.

“ When thy dearest friends deceive thee,
And cold looks thy love repel,
And the bitter humors grieve thee,
That makes God’s fair earth a hell;
Oh, these are moments, trying moments,
Meant to try thee—use them well.”

PROF. BLACKIE.

ELEANOR was disappointed but not discouraged; the road was still open—she was determined to try again, and only from Anthony’s own lips take a final dismissal from his heart and home. But the next day there was a driving rain-storm, and the weather was wet and cold and blustery for a whole week. Under such conditions the common, being full of hollows, was dangerous for a foot-traveller, especially in the dark; and Eleanor was obliged to bear as patiently as she could that misfortune of the evil elements which often comes as the last straw in trouble. And before the common was passable, Anthony went to his uncle’s, and Martha heard in the village that Squire Bashpoole and his wife and daughter were going to Italy in his company.

“ It is too late,” she said, bitterly—“ too late, Martha. Oh, what shall I do ?”

“ I’d ride over to Squire Bashpoole’s, and ask plain out-and-out to see my husband if I were you, Mistress Aske.”

“ I can’t do that, Martha. If he refused before Jane Bashpoole, I think it would kill me.”

“ You be full o’ pride yet, ma’am. Can’t you write a letter, then ?”

"Yes, I can do that. But if it goes to Bashpoole Manor House, they will never give him it."

"Nay-a! nay-a! Gentlefolks wouldn't do a thing like that! Then send it to Aske Hall; I'll warrant he'll go back there before he leaves England, if it only be for an hour or two."

This plan appeared to Eleanor the best. She wrote a few penitent lines, and asked her husband to come and see her and to bring her forgiveness with him. She addressed her letter to Aske Hall, and Mrs. Parsons, the house-keeper, took it from the post. She knew the handwriting, and she guessed the contents referred to a reconciliation, "which isn't agreeable, nor what is expected or wished for," she commented. "Master is gone—or as good as gone—for all the year; and iverything arranged comfortable for servants at the hall, and missis can be done varry well without. It's not a Botany Bay affair to put t' letter in his room, where he can see it if he looks round for it; and it isn't imprisonment for life to forget to tell him about it." So, without a word, she took the unfortunate petition to a parlor Anthony seldom used, and put it behind a large china vase on the chimney-piece.

As Eleanor expected, Anthony made a final visit to the hall, but he never saw her note, and Mrs. Parsons never remembered to point it out to him. And to the anxious wife, the weary hours of watching and waiting went over as if there was lead in every minute of them. But in four days the suspense was over. She saw the departure of her husband and his uncle's family in the weekly paper, and she realized, as she had never done before, how truly forsaken she was. Love, anger, and jealousy drove her to the very verge of fever; but fortunately her misery ran into motion; she found relief in long, physically exhausting walks, and oblivion in the deep dreamless sleeps that followed them.

In this way the first cruel suffering of her wounded heart was dulled and soothed; and as the summer advanced she was more and more alone with Nature. One day she was coming through a beautiful strip of woods, and she heard some person

singing. It was a man's voice, but so clear and joyful, and so full of rich melody, that she could not but listen, and follow its merry strains. On the brink of a little dripping spring, half hid in a superb growth of purple foxglove, she found the singer. He was lying among the flowers, with his hands clasped above his head; but as Eleanor approached he raised himself upon his elbow, and said, "A good-afternoon to thee, Mistress Aske."

She looked at him, and all fear left her. The face was white and thin, but as candid as a child's; and though his clothes were ragged, and he was nearly barefoot, he did not seem to have any sense of his poverty, or any intention of asking alms.

"I see you know me," said Eleanor; "but I do not remember you."

"Nay, I dare say not. I hev worked for thy father, though, iver since I were a lad big enough to wind a bobbin—that is, when I could frame mysen to work at all. But I often wish I were a flower like one o' these big bells; they neither toil nor spin, but there's varry few men and women that are as gay and happy as they are."

"You sing as if you were happy."

"Nay, I'm not happy. I could be, if I didn't hev to work and think. But I've got a wife and some little childer, and I can't pick up a meal for 'em, as them blackbirds do, in ivery one's field and garden."

"Dear me! I thought from your voice that I had found one happy heart. Everybody I meet is in trouble of some kind."

"Ay, I know. Thou hes thy own sorrow, too. I know all about it, and I think little of a man that can't forgive a wife like thee. Why-a! My wife hes forgiven me hundreds o' times; and she's a bit of a Tartar, too."

"What is your name? Have I ever known your wife?"

"My name is Steve Benson. Happen ta hes heard tell o' my sister Sarah?"

"No, I think not."

"Nor of Joyce Benson?"

"No."

"No, that's likely enough. Master Burley isn't one to talk about his 'hands,' or his business. He hes hed a sight o' trouble lately."

"Yes. Can I do anything for you?"

"Ay, if ta could spare a shilling. I'm going home when t' sun sets, and it would make it easier to do. Here's a bonny lot of ferns. I'll give them to thee and welcome."

"Thank you, Steve Benson, and here is half a crown. I think you are what wise men call a philosopher. I have got half a crown's worth from you." She put the coin into his out-stretched brown palm, and took the nodding ferns and a great handful of bluebells he gave her, and went on her way, wonderfully cheered.

After this she met Steve on the common, or in the wood, several times; and she made a point of carrying a piece of money in her pocket for him. He always took it with a frank pleasure, and he generally had some bit of a curiosity to give in return—a petrified shell, or a queer bird's-nest, or the root of a rare plant. In the clear air of the wolds Eleanor could hear him singing a mile away, and an odd sort of friendship gradually grew up between them. She had never before felt any interest in mill-hands, never wanted to help any of them to realize their idea of happiness; but Steve interested her, and she regretted that her means were too small to effectually aid him. Perhaps it was because he so frankly confessed his faults.

"You see, Mistress Aske," he said, "there hes been a great mistake somewhere in my life. I'm on a wrong road, and I feel it ivery hour of ivery day. Well, then, what is t' good o' me working and tewing, for I'll niver be able to make wrong come right? I just try to get all t' happiness I can. When t' weather is bad I go to t' mill, and I earn a bit o' brass. When t' sun is shining, and t' birds are singing, and t' flowers blowing, and iverything is happy and bonny, I go and tak' my share o' t' pleasure with 'em."

"You are what people call 'lazy,' Steve."

"Ay, I am. An hour ago I saw half a dozen men mending t' road down yonder. There were half a dozen crows in a tree watching them, and you niver heard such a mockery as t' birds made o' t' work. But they cawed a civil 'good-morning' to me. They knew I hed sense enough to enjoy t' sunshine and all t' other good things thet could be hed without spending a penny for them."

"I am afraid you are a foolish fellow, Steve."

"Ay, I dare say. Most folks will tell you so."

"And if you have a wife and children I think you are really doing wrong."

"I about know I am doing wrong. But I can't bide t' heat of t' mill—it gives me a headache—and t' smell of t' wool and t' oil is fair sickening. Sunshine and t' woods are varry much healthier; and then, I may tell thee, t' wife hes her tantrums pretty often. Nature is a deal easier to live wi' than Joyce, poor lass! Human beings are trying, mostly, Mistress Aske."

It was after this conversation Eleanor first spoke to her father about Steve. Jonathan listened with some interest to her description of this lazy lover of Nature.

"He's right enough, Eleanor," he answered; "there has been a mistake somewhere in his life: he's a good lad in a way, and yet he can do good to nobody, not even to himsen. But for that matter, there has been a mistake in thy life. And happen thou aren't doing a bit better with it than he is. Wandering about t' woods and wolds won't put wrong right. I niver heard tell or found out yet of any salvation coming that way. A spoiled life will hev to look a bit higher than Nature."

"Steve says you are the best of good masters to him. He says, 'Master Burley pays me all I earn, and he niver casts up my faults to me.'"

"Happen I hev a good reason for being patient with t' poor lad. I hev a Master, too, Eleanor; and I hev tried his patience above a bit these last three years or more."

"I know, father. I have brought sorrow and care and loss without end on you."

"Ay, thou hes! That is t' truth, and there's no use covering it up with a lie or a compliment. But I think a deal worse of my sen than I do of thee. I hed spoiled thee to begin wi'. I was nearly forty years older than thou wert. I knew t' world and thou didn't. I'll go deep down to t' bottom o' my heart, and say, I was a bit jealous o' Aske my sen, and t' quarrel was smouldering in my own soul, or I wouldn't hev been so ready to lift thy quarrel."

"Late as it is, can we not put an end to the trouble? I will go back to Anthony, and ask him to forgive me, and try and do my duty pleasantly for the future."

"Nay, thou won't. If ta turns traitor to me now, thou wilt be a mean-hearted lass. Aske may ruin me, as far as brass is concerned; but if I hev his wife, I can still snap my fingers o'er him. Nay, nay, thou must stand by me now! It would be t' cruelest blow of all if thou should leave me after I had spent t' last shilling I hev in thy quarrel."

"Is it as bad as that, father?"

"It's coming to it. But I'll fight him as long as iver I can. If he is Yorkshire, so am I. I won't give in as long as I can hit back. And when he's got all my money, and ruined my business, and turned me out of my home, I can still crow over him, if he hesn't got thee."

"I do not believe Anthony wants me."

"Doesn't he? Ay, but he does! Thou art what he is fighting for. He thinks when he hes driven thee out o' thy fine home, and me to day's work, thou wilt be glad to turn thy back on me."

"Never! I'd never, never do that."

The tears trembled in Jonathan's eyes, and his lips quivered as he spoke. Eleanor bent forward and took his hands in hers, and kissed them, and said solemnly, once more, "I would never, never do that, father."

But the conversation made her very miserable. It was quite

evident from it that Jonathan neither expected nor desired a compromise, and that any reconciliation she made with her husband would be repudiated by him ; for, in spite of what he had said to his daughter about his utter ruin, he still believed in his case, and felt certain of success if he could only "keep going" for a few months longer. But, oh ! the misery of the law's delay ! The fears and hopes and doubts that broke that long summer to pieces left traces on both Jonathan and Eleanor that no future years ever quite effaced.

Towards the end of December, when the crisis in Jonathan's affairs was approaching, he became strangely calm. It was as if he had exhausted every energy in some tremendous effort and a patient watching for events was all that remained for him. Or else it was the result of a submission of heart that had come with the sense that he had done all that it was possible for him to do. At any rate, the mood was so obvious, even to himself, that he could not help speaking to Ben Holden about it.

And Ben, always sympathetic, heartily rejoiced in it. "Thou art full of human nature, Jonathan," he replied ; "and human nature is about t' same thing as it iver was. T' disciples were just like thee. They toiled and they tewed all night long in t' storm, and when they were beat out, then they woke up t' Christ, and were willing he should do for 'em what they couldn't do for theirsens."

"Well, I think a deal better of t' disciples for it. We've got a right to try and help oursens, Ben. When you set a new hand to a job of work, you'd think little of him if he didn't do all and iver he could do before he came to thee and said, 'Master, I'm fair beat wi' t' job. I hev got t' threads all tangled up, and I want thee to put 'em right for me.' Now, I'm none ashamed to go to God and tell him, 'I hev done all I can. I can do no more. Thou undertake my enemy for me.'"

"And will ta do whatever he tells thee to do?"

"Ay, will I."

"Well, I believe thee, Jonathan."

God giveth his beloved *in* their sleep. Surely some swift

and subtle intelligence visited Jonathan one night in the Christmas week. His affairs had not apparently changed in any way for the better, yet he rose in a restful, passive mood, feeling only the patient care of a submissive heart. Softly as a hidden yet forgiven child he dressed himself, facing, as he did so, the consequences of his rash, self-willed temper.

For the very first time it struck him consciously that others would suffer in his ruin quite as much as himself. How hard it would be for the daintily reared Eleanor to bear the limitations of actual, bare, cramping poverty. And Sarah! And all the "hands," to whom he had ever been a just and kind master! He remembered this morning that the closing of Burley's Mill would mean, to most of them, the breaking up of their homes, and perhaps the scattering of their effects, the separation of families, and the beginning of new lives in unknown places and among strange people. These thoughts made him speak with a singular tenderness to his daughter, and he saw the tears come into her eyes with happy surprise at it.

The day was a cold winter day, and the whole country white and spectral with unbroken snow. The farm-houses and the scattered mills rose up from it dark and well-defined, like islands in a spellbound sea. In some way it seemed exactly to fit his mood, and he walked to the mill that morning wondering at the subdued, resigned influence that swayed him.

Ben Holden met him at the gates, and said something to him about the machinery in the lower weaving-room. He went with him and examined it, and then slowly ascended to the upper shed. He had not been in it for weeks. One-half of the looms were idle, but Sarah Benson was in her old place.

He had avoided her—consciously avoided her lately, not that he loved her less, but because, in the gathering difficulties of his life, any happy termination to his love seemed so impossible. But he looked at her steadily and inquiringly this morning. Her lips quivered, and she returned the glance with one of infinite sorrow and sympathy. Steve was not in his place. Their eyes met again over his empty loom, and Sarah dropped hers

with a sigh. Jonathan could no longer be silent. He stood near her and asked, "How is ta, dear lass?"

"I'm well, master."

But Jonathan felt a keen pang at the words. For her face was white and wasted. There were dark, heavy rings round her eyes, and the eyes themselves were wells of sorrow. For when the weird is very long, and the cup very bitter, it always leaves a permanent shadow in the eyes. It was hard work to pass her without another word, but Jonathan did it.

About the middle of the day Ben Holden came to him, and said, "I hev just heard that Aske is home again."

"Varry well. Let him come. He can only hurt me as far as he's let hurt me."

"And after a', Jonathan, what's t' good o' worritting thysen to death about such trash as looms and money?"

"There is a good deal o' use in it, Ben. Job didn't call God's gifts 'trash.' He didn't tell himsen that it was a good thing when his riches were taken away from him. The Eternal hed given, and it was a gift; he hed taken away, and it was a loss. And I want thee to notice in particular, that it wasn't his poverty, nor his ulcers, that made Job angry. It was t' exasperating advices and condolences o' his friends. Now it isn't my losses—I'm none feared to work—it's my friends and my neighbors, and the things they'll hev to say, that bothers me."

"Well, if ta holds thy peace, they'll soon get tired of talking. Wi' silence you can plague t' devil. I hev done it."

"I'd a deal rather talk up to him. Sarah Benson is looking varry badly; does ta know how Steve is getting on?"

"He's not getting on at all. Sarah hes Steve's family to find for, in t' main. As for Steve, he works an hour or two now and then; but he's far more like a gypsy than a Christian. He's niver happy but when he's away to t' sea-side or to t' moors. Joyce is niver well. There are two children now, and poor Sarah hes to keep things together, or they'd be in t' work-house. She's fair worn out, poor lass!"

"God help her! I see that."

"Thou looks more like thysen, Jonathan, than I have seen thee for a long while. Hes ta any good news?"

"Ay, I think I hev. I got a letter from my old uncle Shuttleworth half an hour ago. He says he hes just heard from a friend o' mine of t' fight I am having with Aske. And he says he isn't a bit too old to hev a hand in it, and he's going to hev fair play for me, if money can get it. So I'm going oover to Keighley to see him this afternoon. Shuttleworth hes a mint o' brass, and I'll give Aske another tussle, with his help."

"Is it any use, Jonathan?"

"Ay, is it. I won't give up now. Truth and oil are bound to come to t' top."

"Is it worth it?"

"It is worth it to me. I'm not Ben Holden. Thou cares so little for this world that there would be no risk in t' devil taking thee up into a high mountain, and showing thee all t' kingdoms of t' world. And I'm in t' right. That's where it is. I know I am, and I'm going to fight for my right to t' last shilling I can lawfully get. Shuttleworth hes offered to help me. It's a fair wonder. He never gave me a penny in his life; no, nor anybody else one. He's seventy-five years old, and he's keen to fight Aske oover again, if needs be. I'm going to see him this afternoon, and I'll stay at Keighley until everything is settled."

"Does ta know when ta will be back? I want to go to Otley this Christmas Feast to see my sister."

"I won't be back before Christmas-eve."

"Am I to give t' hands their extra pay this Christmas? Can ta afford it?"

"Ay, I feel as if I could afford them all they have iver had, and a shilling more. Don't make it a penny less, and tell them I wish 'em all 'A Merry Christmas and a Good New Year.'"

CHAPTER X.

THE HAND THAT TURNS BACK.

“He putteth down one, and setteth up another.”—*Ps. lxxv. 7.*

“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”—*Rom. xii. 19.*

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.”—*Eccles. vii. 2.*

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”—*Rom. xii. 21.*

KEIGHLEY was then a pretty Yorkshire town surrounded by sylvan scenery, and with few premonitions of the factory and furnace smoke that was in the future to make it rich. It was nearly dark when Burley reached it; but Jonas Shuttleworth was a famous man in Keighley, and his residence was easily found. It was one of a long row of small white cottages, and when Jonathan knocked with his hand upon the door, a strong, querulous voice called out, “If ta is Jonathan Burley, come in.”

The two men had never seen each other before, and the elder one looked at his visitor with sharp but not unkindly eyes. “So thou art my nephew Jonathan. Why, thou looks varry near as old as I am! Come thy ways in to t’ fire, and sit thee down; thou’s welcome. I thought thou’d be here, and I hev waited tea a bit for thee.”

He was a thin, rosy-cheeked old man, with eyes as quick and bright as a ferret’s, and plenty of money wrinkles round them; very tall, but remarkably erect; and even when quiet, giving an idea of extreme pugnaciousness. He wore a rather shabby corduroy suit and a scarlet nightcap, and on Jonathan’s entrance rose, pipe in hand, to welcome him.

The tea was quickly placed upon a small round table between them, and without any preliminaries the subject of Burley’s

troubles introduced. "I hev heard a good deal," said Shuttleworth, "but I want to hear it all from thy own lips. Tell me t' whole truth just as if I was thy lawyer, and don't thee be afraid to let out any bit o' meanness thou hes been forced to do—I'm none too clean-handed mysen."

The subject was one on which Jonathan always waxed eloquent. He described his mill, his house, and his beautiful daughter enthusiastically. He told of her courtship by Squire Aske, of his pride in the connection, and of the handsome settlement he had made on the bride. He did not entirely justify Eleanor in the matrimonial disputes which had followed her marriage, but he excused her largely because of her youth and high spirit, and because also of her nascent jealousy of Jane Bashpoole. Then, with kindling anger, he described her return home, the stand he had taken in the quarrel, and Aske's quiet, persistent, iniquitous revenge.

Before he had done, the elder man was on fire. He had put his pipe down, and with his arms laid across the table, was listening with ill-suppressed passion to Jonathan. "My word!" he cried, when the story was finished—"my word! but we'll give 'em enough of it! I like t' little lass for heving such a spirit. I'd like to thresh Aske for putting a finger on her. If I was nobbut a young man I'd do it. But I hevn't done with them. I can meet him with t' English law, and thou ask Matthew Rhodes what he thinks of fighting Jonas Shuttleworth that way. But I'll tell thee, Jonathan, what I am going to do in t' morning. We have another hour to-night, and I'll spend that in getting to know thee."

With these words he dropped the subject of the lawsuit entirely, and manifested an almost childish curiosity about Eleanor's appearance, her dresses, her entertainments at Aske Hall, her presentation at court, and her acquaintance with great people. If Jonathan had not first seen the other side of his uncle's character, he would almost have despised him for his womanish curiosity about such small things.

In the morning, however, Jonas Shuttleworth was a very dif-

ferent man. Before Burley had finished his breakfast he was at his hotel. "Ay," he said, in answer to Burley's invitation—"ay, I'll have a cup o' coffee; eating and drinking helps talking. I think I hev got t' hang o' thy affairs now, and I'll tell thee what we'll do. First, about thy mill—how many looms hes ta idle!"

"Eight hundred."

"Set 'em going at once."

"It will take a deal o' money to do that."

"I'll be bound for it. I'll hev to do summat wi' my brass. I was thinking o' sending it to t' Fejees and t' Africans; but happen it will be just as good a thing to keep five hundred Yorkshire lasses at work in their own village. It's a bad thing when mill-hands hev to run here and there for work. Home's a full cup, Jonathan."

"You're right, Shuttleworth; and God knows I'll be glad and grateful to see ivery shuttle flying again and to watch t' old crowd in and out of t' gates, morning and night. I will that!"

"As to Bashpoole lot, I hev an old spite at them. Squire Bashpoole and me hes been tooth and nail at it three times, and I hev licked him ivery time—*wi' damages!* I'm going to please mysen about him and his family. Dost ta know them big gates at t' entrance of his park, Jonathan?"

"Ay, I hev seen 'em."

"And thou remembers that little mill village round Long-bottom's factory that straggles right up to 'em?"

"I think I do."

"I own t' most o' them cottages; and I own that strip o' sandy, frowsy land running above them, in a line wi' the high wall Bashpoole built to shut his own park in. He said t' factory lads and lasses got oover t' pailings and walked among his beeches, and he didn't like it. So he built 'em out. Well, on that strip o' sandy land I am going to put up a soap factory. There's plenty o' wool mills round, and soap is a sure thing; and though he can build lads and lasses out, he can't build a smell out."

Jonathan burst into a hearty laugh. "You'll be indicted for a nuisance," he said.

"Ay, I will. I'll like that. I'm out of a lawsuit of any kind now. I hev had twenty-four, my lad, and *won them all!* T' tenants in them cottages are mostly my tenants. I can make t' rents that comfortable they wouldn't smell a brimstone factory—and, ta knows, they are well used to bad smells with t' boiling wool in t' mills. Bashpoole will swear it's a nuisance; varry good, there's fifty o' my tenants—closer to t' nuisance than he is—will swear it isn't. Bashpoole is a varry parnickaty, fussy old gentleman. That soap factory will bring him to his senses, if anything will. I'll teach him to meddle wi' my bonny grandniece, and to hev his high-flying, fox-hunting daughter travelling round t' world wi' my niece's husband. He'll hev to come and see me in t' end about that soap-boiling, and then I'll tell him plainly, 'Tit for tat, squire. Your nephew built a lock to annoy my nephew.' If there's anything I call a satisfactory payment, Burley, it is paying a man in his own coin. Now, then, when does ta expect the verdict about thy case?"

"Soon after the New Year."

"I'm impatient for it. If it isn't a fair one, we won't hev it at any price. We'll fight t' whole case oover. We'll take it to t' Lords and Commons before we'll be beat. My word, Jonathan! I'd like thee to see Matthew Rhodes's face to-morrow when I tell him I'm going to tackle Aske."

"Will ta see Rhodes to-morrow?"

"Ay; I hev a varry gratifying bit o' business with him. He hes some money to pay me in a case I won last week—only a right o' way, that one o' his clients robbed me of. I didn't want it, but I wouldn't hev it taken without leave or license; and it's turned out to be worth two hundred pounds and expenses. I'm going to see Rhodes to-morrow, and get t' little bit o' brass."

"I'll go with thee if ta likes."

"I'd like nothing better."

Certainly Jonas Shuttleworth looked as if the business

pleased him. He was as cheery and chirrupy as if he were going to a bridal, and an apparently irrepressible smile lingered about his puckered mouth all the way to Leeds. Rhodes met him with a grim, watchful courtesy, and was evidently surprised to see Jonathan Burley with him.

The money was silently paid over, and Shuttleworth, having carefully tied it up in a buckskin bag, said, "There is some pleasure in fighting thee, Rhodes. Thou art no fool. I'm right glad thou art Anthony Aske's lawyer, for now thee and me are going to hev it hot and heavy!"

"Sir?"

"I say, as thou art Aske's lawyer, thee and me are in for t' biggest fight thou iver had."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Shuttleworth."

"Well, I'll mek mysen clear enough before I've done. Aske and thee are two of as big rascals as Yorkshire owns; but I'm not going to see you rogue my nephew any longer."

"I am somewhat accustomed to your adjectives, Mr. Shuttleworth; still, I would advise you that to call a man 'a rascal' is actionable."

"Keep thy advice until I think it worth paying for; or make an action of t' word 'rascal' if ta wants to. Dost ta think that any jury in t' West Riding is going to fine me for telling thee a bit o' truth? Thou art too well known round here to get a farthing o' damages, Rhodes. And thou wilt hev enough to do just now to defend thy client against me and my nephew."

"Mr. Shuttleworth, I have paid you all the law allowed, and my business is done with you. Good-morning."

"Stop a bit. My business isn't done with thee, and that is what I'm staying for. Dost ta think anybody stops a minute longer in thy spider's parlor than they can help? I hev come to tell thee that Jonathan Burley is my nephew, my sister's lad, and that I am going to fight his quarrel for him."

Rhodes looked quickly up. He was astonished and dismayed; but he controlled himself wonderfully, and answered, with apparent indifference, "I congratulate Mr. Burley on his

champion. It is a pity, Shuttleworth, that you did not come forward before your nephew was ruined."

"Speak about what thou knows. My nephew ruined! Not he! He'll hev time now to run ivery loom in his mill, for I'm going to look after t' lawyers for him. And I want thee to understand I wasn't fool enough to come up wi' my help in t' beginning of t' battle. I was waiting till Aske's bank account was overdrawn. Now, tell him he hes got the whole quarrel to fight oover again, if t' verdict don't suit us. I'm quite ready for it. I've hed my say now, and so I'll bid thee good-morning."

"Ready for it!" If Jonas Shuttleworth had said "longing for it," he would only have spoken the truth. He was one of those men to whom the legal arena is a positive delight; and Burley's case appealed to his feelings on several sides. The two men spent a really happy time together, and when Jonathan left his uncle on Christmas-eve it was with a heart full of hope and gratitude. He felt ten years younger, for as iron sharpeneth iron, so he had been brightened and strengthened by his uncle's help and sympathy.

The snow still lay upon the moors, but he knew them well, and the road to his own home would be much shortened by going across them. True, he would be compelled to pass Aske Hall, but the thought now rather stimulated him. He had been told that Aske had come home, but he did not feel then as if he would go a yard out of his way to avoid meeting his enemy.

In the mean time Eleanor was in a mood of peculiar sadness. Her father had not told her of Shuttleworth's letter, and she thought it very likely that this would be her last Christmas in Burley House. And never, in all her memories of the festival, had Christmas-eve seemed so little like it. The servants were middle-aged, and disinclined to pleasure that put the house out of order or made extra work. No one, this year, had thought it worth while to gather holly and haw, or to hang up the pleasant mistletoe branch. A little extra cooking seemed to be

the one idea of Christmas left in their sad house; and to Eleanor's mind there was nothing festive in that rite.

In the afternoon she went out, to walk off the melancholy that oppressed her. The ground was white and hard, and there were plenty of greens and berries in the park; but, after a moment's thought, she found that she had no heart to gather them. Besides, the park was not a place she liked to walk in; for, among its shady groves Anthony had wooed and won her. She was constantly met there by sudden drifts of tender thoughts, which only gave her unavailing regret and sorrow.

Her usual walk was a little lane that skirted the back of the house, and led directly over the common to Aske Hall. It was the road she had taken that unfortunate night, when she made her unsuccessful effort to see her husband. The misery of that long, dark walk, the sight of the handsome, angry face of the man she still loved, the apparent hopelessness of all reconciliation, made it always a sorrowful way to her. For since her last conversation with her father, she understood plainly that he would regard any advance towards her husband as a deep and cruel wrong to himself. She was in a sore strait, and she felt utterly unable to do anything in it but endure and wait.

In the cold, gray afternoon she walked rapidly, folding her long black cloak tight around her, to protect herself from the keen air. She was not thinking of any grief in particular; it was only *Anthony! Anthony!* that ran like the echo of some mournful cry through her heart. At that moment Anthony was passing Burley House. Perhaps some hope of seeing his wife had led him to take that road. Perhaps he had chosen it simply because it was a mile or two shorter.

In time, we forgive even those whom we have injured. His proud heart felt a pang as he passed the little garden wicket, where Eleanor, in the first bloom of her fresh loveliness and love had so often stood watching his arrival and departure. The lonely look of the big dwelling also touched him. He slackened his rein, and rode onward, full of regretful thoughts. At a sudden turning a few yards before him he saw a woman

approaching. Her head was dropped, she was dressed in black, in the chill winter twilight she had an inexpressible air of pathetic and yet proud sadness.

Oh, how well he knew her! It was his Eleanor! his wife! The woman still tenderly beloved. A perfect tempest was in his heart. If he had been strong enough, he would have lifted her to his saddle, and carried her back to his home. He could not determine whether to stop and speak to her, or to pass her by unless she spoke to him; and while he was trying to decide, he found himself close to her.

Then Eleanor looked up and recognized the proud, handsome face, gazing so intently into hers. Alas! in the shock and surprise, she did not see the tender longing, the unspoken invitation that made it almost luminous. She stood still a moment, trembling violently, but speech entirely forsook her; and possessed she knew not by what fear, she hurried on. Then she heard his horse's hoofs in a mad gallop, and every beat of them seemed to be upon her heart. Love, longing, shame, sorrow, tossed her on a sea of passionate regret.

“Oh, if she could retrace the evil road! Oh, if Anthony could ever again be the lover-husband of the old happy days! Why had she not spoken to him? Why had she not held his bridal-reins and made him listen to her? Oh, how foolish, how cowardly, she had been. And Anthony would think her still proud and unforgiving and unrepentant. Oh, what a miserable wife she was;” and thus murmuring broken laments, and prayers of contrition, and implorations for pardon and comfort, she went rapidly, and almost unconsciously, along the frozen road.

At the same hour, Jonathan was driving homeward in an unusually happy mood, and as he crossed the lonely moor he was singing his favorite hymn for company:

“Though trouble springs not from the dust,
Nor sorrow from the ground,
Yet ills on ills, by Heaven's decree,
In man's estate are found.

“As sparks in close succession rise,
So man, the child of woe,
Is doom’d to endless cares and toils
Through all his life below.

“But with my God I leave my cause,
From him I seek relief ;
To him, in confidence of prayer,
Unbosom all my grief.

“Unnumbered are his wondrous works,
Unsearchable his ways ;
’Tis his the mourning soul to cheer,
The bowèd-down to raise.”

He went over and over the verses, trying to make them fit—first to one tune he liked, and then another. Not far from Aske Hall he saw two men leap over the wall and disappear. He called to them to come and clean the balled snow out of his horse’s feet, but they paid no attention to his request. The circumstance, though a trivial one, impressed him unpleasantly. The spirit of song was gone—he was suddenly watchful and expectant. He turned in his gig and looked all around. The snow was so white that darker objects easily attracted attention, and Burley noticed a horse, restless and rearing.

“That horse must be tied,” he argued. “If it was restless and loose, it wouldn’t remain in t’ same place.”

He drove near to it, alighted, and examined the creature. It was a fine mare, expensively caparisoned, and some one had fastened her securely to the stone wall. He had instantly an impression that the animal was Aske’s, and he connected its peculiar situation with the flight of the two men who had refused to answer his call.

“There’s something wrong here !” he muttered. “I wonder if Aske hes gotten hurt, or if he’s been robbed !” He stood still and thought a few moments. “If he hes, it’s none of my affair. He deserves all and more than he’ll get in this world, I’m sure. I might call at t’ Hall and tell them about it, though ;

and happen, it might be some stranger going to Aske for t' Christmas holidays. I mebbe ought to look round a bit."

He was walking slowly along the stone fence as these thoughts passed through his mind, and he had not gone fifty yards, when he saw the white, upturned face of an apparently dead man.

"*Why—a—it's Aske!*"

He shook all over. For a moment a fierce joy thrilled him from head to foot ; the next one he was stooping over his prostrate foe and asking, "Does ta know me?"

"Water!" gasped Aske.

"Ay, I'll get it for thee."

There is always running water by a stone fence on a Yorkshire moor, and Burley knew, though it was silent under its coat of ice, it was there. But what should he bring it in? He was a man good in emergencies, and he took out his watch, broke off the case, and filled it again and again with precious mouthfuls for the perishing man.

"Don't leave me to die, Burley. I—will—give—up—the—suit!" whispered Aske. "Save me, Burley."

"Not for t' biggest bill o' damages iver given."

"I'll—give—up—the—mill, too."

"Not for t' mill, nor for all thou hast. But it's Christmas-eve, and for Christ's sake I'll save thee if I can. My gig is close by, and I am going to lift thee into it. Bear up as well as ta can."

But with the first movement Aske became insensible, and Jonathan discovered that his head was bleeding profusely. He bound it with his own handkerchief as tightly as possible; then with his pocket-knife he cut loose Aske's horse. "It will let them know there's summat wrong, and fetch help, happen."

Then he brought his gig as close as possible to Aske, and lifted the insensible man into it. The body of the vehicle was too small to allow Aske to be laid across it, but he supported him against himself, keeping his left arm around him, and holding the reins with the right. He drove as rapidly as possible,

and near the Hall gates met some grooms from the stables, who had been alarmed by the return of the riderless horse. Two of them remained to assist Burley with the wounded squire, the rest were sent in every direction in search of any medical aid that could be found.

The force by which a man throws a good action out of him is invisible and mystical, like that which makes trees blossom and fruit, and Jonathan, in the pitiful, holy work of saving life, had never once remembered that it was the life of his bitterest enemy. Not until he was alone again did he take notice of his blood-stained hand and clothes, and recollect, with a shudder, whose blood it was.

Oh, if he had been thus stained with taking life instead of sparing it ! For one awful moment he had a revelation of a murderer's terror and remorse ; the next, his heart rose in a wave of gratitude that found expression in a fervent, audible “Thank God ! thank God !” And all the way home he was ejaculating, “ It might have been ! But for His mercy ! God forgive me ! God forgive me !”

CHAPTER XI.

SARAH AND STEVE'S TROUBLE.

“Earth would be heaven, if there were *no mistakes in it*; and if men could not spoil their whole life by one error.”

“The animosities perish; the humanities are eternal.”

“Our bosoms heave to heaven; our very heart throbs upward.”

WHEN Jonathan reached his home he drove to the back of the house, and calling the groom, he pointed out the condition of the vehicle, and told him to get it ready for Mistress Aske. The man looked at his master with an inquiring—almost a suspicious—face, and Burley answered the look by pointing to his own clothing, and then describing, in a few words, the tragedy he had been an actor in.

“But I don’t wonder at thy wrong thought o’ me, Jimmy,” he added, “for I hev seen mysen the last hour as others must often hev seen me. Thank God, though, I hev clean hands yet, though they are dabbled wi’ Aske’s blood.”

He left the man then, but he could feel the doubt that still shadowed his face, and made him offer neither remark nor sympathy; and he had a still more poignant sense of what horror and fear he must have endured had he been indeed guilty of his enemy’s death.

Having hurriedly changed his clothing, he went to look for his daughter. She was lying on a sofa in the small parlor that was now their usual sitting-room. The fire was burning brightly, and the tray with the teacups on the table, but the lights were unlit, and her face was turned to the wall, for she had been weeping bitterly ever since her unexpected meeting with Anthony in the lane. When she heard her father’s step she

made haste to dry her eyes, and as he entered the room she rose to meet him.

In a moment she was aware of something unusual and terrible; Jonathan's face had yet upon it the solemn shadow of one who has been in the awful presence of Death. She went to his side, and said, in a low voice, "Father, what is it?"

He put his arm around her, and answered, "Thy husband he's been a' but murdered. Now, if ta is half a woman thou wilt go to him."

She lifted her eyes quickly to his face, and there was a dreadful suspicion in them, but Jonathan promptly answered the question her lips durst not ask.

"Nay, nay, my lass. God saved thy father from that fate. I found Aske bleeding to death on t' common, and I took him home. Now what is ta going to do?"

"I am going to him."

She spoke very quietly, and when the words were uttered, left the room to put on her bonnet and cloak. Jonathan was amazed at her composure; for when she came down-stairs, though she was pallid as a corpse, she made no outcry, and her manner was singularly still and calm. The gig was waiting, and he kissed her and sent her away without another word. For a moment he stood listening to the departing wheels; then the burden of his care felt a little lighter. He had done what he could, and he began to be sensible that he was very weary, and almost fainting for lack of food.

When Martha brought in his tea he thought it best to tell her the whole circumstance; and indeed he could not dismiss it from his mind. "Such a Christmas-eve! Such a Christmas-eve!" he kept saying over and over, as he sat smoking and musing in his own room; for the last few hours had completely altered the tenor of his strongest feelings. He was like a man that had been suddenly and rudely awakened out of a weird, uneasy dream.

During his visit to Jonas Shuttleworth he had been constantly and steadily abusing Aske. He had talked of nothing else

but the wrong Aske had done him, and the means and conditions of his revenge on Aske. He had stimulated his hatred until it had become the ruling passion of his life. Three hours ago he would have called any man "friend" who had brought him tidings of Aske's probable death.

And the miracle was this—he could not, he could not rekindle the flame of hatred against him.

"I'm not mysen at all," he muttered; "I'd be most willing to swear it wasn't Jonathan Burley in my coat-sleeves to-night. Whatever hes come oover me? It is like as if God had said to me, 'Jonathan Burley, thou hes done thy own way long enough. Turn thee round about and do My way!' When t' sun set to-night I hated Aske wi' all my heart and soul. I thought I hed t' best o' reasons for hating him; and to think o' me toiling and tewing to save Aske! It's past believing! My word! but God sends men on strange errands—and they go, too!"

He did not sleep much; and when he did sleep he was still aware of that helpless, bleeding form which he had supported in his arms. Once he dreamed that he had been the murderer of Aske, and he awoke in a sweat of agony. Then he realized how justly Christ Jesus declared the man who harbored murderous thoughts to be as morally guilty as the man who puts them into practice. He arose several times during the night and knelt down and thanked God because he had given him grace to save the man whom often in his heart he had ardently longed to kill.

In the morning he had a note from Eleanor. She said an eminent London surgeon had been telegraphed for, but that the local physicians thought the case almost hopeless. There was already violent inflammation of the brain. The young Squire of Aske was lying unconscious on the verge of a bloody and untimely grave. The motive for the attack had evidently been robbery. Aske had been to Leeds, and had drawn a large sum of money from the Spinner's Bank. Both it and his watch and rings were gone. As he read this information Jonathan remembered the two men whom he had seen upon the common,

and he went immediately to the police-station and described their appearance as well as he could. He felt then that he had done his full duty, and he tried in some measure to dismiss the event from his mind.

But the very absence of Eleanor kept it present. That he should have sent her back to her husband was a part of the miracle which had set his life in an atmosphere of wonder. When he entered the parlor the thought was not in his mind. The words had sprung unconsciously to his lips. They had been no more the outcome of his own heart than was the humanity of his action to his bleeding enemy. Nay, the sending back of Eleanor was the more remarkable of the two events. It was the surrender of his sharpest weapon to his foe. "It's the Lord's doing! It's the Lord's doing!" he kept assuring himself; "and, doubtless, he knows how it is a' to end, for it caps me!"

It being Christmas-day also helped to rivet and to intensify the impressions of the circumstances. He gave much larger gifts to his household than usual, though he had never been less able to afford gifts; and after eating his solitary dinner he remembered that there was a festival at the chapel for the poor children of the congregation, and he determined to go and add something to its provision for them, though it should only be a penny to each child. For his heart was full of a living, restless gratitude that could not find adequate expression in mere words.

And yet it was a little effort to leave his warm, bright room and go out into the dark and slush; for a drizzling rain had come on at noon, and with the rain a quick thaw. He thought for a moment of his horse and gig, but it was only for a moment. "There would be varry little merit in doing a kindness, and making t' poor nag bear t' brunt of iverything unpleasant about it. I'll button up and carry mysen to t' chapel." And so with quick, resolute steps which kept time to some melody in his own heart, he went that Christmas night to the children's festival.

He had changed a couple of sovereigns into pennies on his way through the village, and he was soon filling the small hands stretched out to him. "Tell your mammies Burley said these were for spice for yoursens. You are to buy taffy or owt you like with 'em." And if a man wants to taste the delight of genuine gratitude he must cater for the happiness of little children. Burley got a full two sovereigns' worth of pleasure, and with a light heart, trustful and trusting, he turned homeward again.

It was a soaking, wretched night, but as he passed the police-station he saw Sarah Benson come out of it. She drew her shawl over her head and hurried on, but he soon overtook her.

"Sarah, my dear lass, a good Christmas to thee!"

She turned to him with a little cry, and a face so white and sorrowful that it shocked him; then, lifting her apron, she began to sob behind it.

"Sarah! Sarah! Whatever is it—joy?"

"It's the childer, master—the poor little childer. They are cold and hungry, and Joyce hed another little lass yesterday, and she's varry bad off. I'm most beside mysen!"

"Where's Steve?"

"Thet is t' worst of a'! He hesn't been home for two days, and he knew Joyce was like to be ill any hour. There must be summat wrong, I'm sure, for Steve is none bad-hearted."

"Was ta at 'station' about him?"

"Ay; I went to ask if they hed heard tell o' any accident, and they acted varry queer-like. I'm most broken-hearted, I think."

"Go thee straight home, Sarah. I'll bring iverything that is needful to thee. My word! but I am glad I came out to-night."

In half an hour bread and meat, and milk and coals, were at the cottage; and Jonathan, who was very wet, sat down by the fire to warm and dry his feet. How could he help watching Sarah amid her many cares and duties, with eyes full of pity? The children were to feed and undress. The sick mother, half unconscious and very hard to manage, kept continually calling

her. It was easy to see that upon Sarah the whole helpless family leaned.

As she was walking a sickly little child to sleep, a woman opened the door and looked in with a troubled face. Sarah caught the look and stopped suddenly.

"Oh, woman! woman!" she cried, "what is t' matter? Where is Steve? Dost ta know?"

"Ay, I'm sorry to say he's in prison, Sarah; I am that."

Sarah did not scream or faint. Her blood rushed to her face, and then back in a choking tide to her heart.

"Who told thee so?"

"My man saw him and Jerry Yates and Mike Todd brought to t' lock-up."

"Did ta hear what for?"

"Ay; they are took for robbing Squire Aske. T' squire is badly hurt, too, and folks say it will be murder, and no less."

"Master, dost thou know owt? Is this true about t' squire?"

"I must tell thee it is, Sarah. I'm varry sorry—"

"Then leave me alone, will you? Polly—master—go away; I want to be by mysen a bit."

A great grief is a great consecration. Both instantly and pityingly obeyed her request. But as Jonathan went out he said, "Don't fret more than thou can help, Sarah. I don't believe Steve hed anything to do wi' t' robbery of Squire Aske. I don't believe he knew anything about it; but I'll go and see him first thing to-morrow morning. I wouldn't wonder if this isn't going to be t' varry best thing iver happened Steve. Tak' my word for it, things will come right in t' long run."

"Oh, master! I hev given my whole life to t' lad; and now, it seems like t' ending is to be a prison, or maybe worse."

"But where would he hev been but for thee? Think of that. Sarah, it is for t' sick woman and for t' little childer; thou must take it;" and he laid a five-pound note upon the table.

"Thank thee; I'll take it. I'm none above taking help when I can't help mysen any longer."

Early in the morning Burley went to see Steve Benson. The poor miserable man was quite broken down with his misfortune; and in spite of his anger Jonathan could not help feeling a great pity for such a complete failure as Steve had proved. He had still the frank, open face, and the candid, careless manner which had always won him, not only favor with women, but a singular degree of toleration for men. Steve had undoubtedly been a lazy fellow, but he had not deteriorated as fast nor as badly in the society of nature as he would have done in the society of human beings of his own kind.

Ere Jonathan was aware he had dropped the stern rough mien which he had thought it right to assume, and was listening to Steve's story, with every desire to find in it an apology for his situation.

"You see, master," the culprit said, "I left home two days before Christmas to try and make a few shillings by cutting greens and mistletoe, and selling them. Look at my clothes, master; and I hed not been able to give my sen a full meal for a long time. How could I stand t' cold? Nobody likes t' woods better than I do; and I knew well where t' finest berries and holly were; but I could scarce walk or work for t' cold. I was falling asleep all t' time; and I was feared to give way, lest I'd niver wake again. Not that it would hev made much difference to any one—"

"It's a shame o' thee to say that. Thee, that hes such a sister! and a good wife, and little childer, too!"

"Poor Sarah! She hes borne and borne iverything for me. And, master, it isn't my fault; I have tried."

"It is thy fault—thou hesn't tried. There was always work waiting for thee at my mill, and niver a fault flung in thy face."

"Master, thou likes thy mill. Thou doesn't mind t' heat, and t' smell, and t' close work. I hate t' mill. I hate t' heat of it; it makes my head burn and throb. I hate t' smell of it; it turns me sick as death; and all t' time I'm deafened wi' t' noise of it, I hear t' sea in my ears, and I remember t' cool salt air,

and *I hev to go to it.* Thou can't judge me. I wan't to do right and I hevn't t' power to do it."

"God forbid I should judge thee, Steve. But how about this affair of Aske's? Thou wert taken with a varry bad couple."

"I know I was. Ta sees, on Christmas-eve I hed four shillings, and I thought I would go home with it. Just below Longley's mill I met Billy Britton, and he was beating his donkey, like the brute he is, beyond iverything! I just said a few words to him about it, and then he turned on me, and he would hev given me my fairings if Yates and Todd hedn't come up. Well, master, you know yoursen you'd hev thought it right to be civil to men as hed helped you out o' Billy Britton's clutches; and when Todd said, 'Come and hev a glass at t' "Ring o' Bells," Steve,' I said, 'And thank'ee both,' and went."

"What time on Christmas-eve was that?"

"I don't know exactly; but soon afterwards I heard t' clock in t' Ring o' Bells strike seven; and I said, 'I hev to get home, lads, now,' and in a bit I left them. But when I put my hand in my pocket my four shillings were gone; and I thought to mysen, 'There's no use going home now. Joyce will cry and scold, and Sarah's still white face I can't abear to see.' So I crept in among Squire Thornbury's hay, and slept till Christmas afternoon. Then I went up to t' big house and got a real good dinner, and t' butler hed a fiddle, and I played for 'em till dark; and perhaps I hed too much spiced ale, for when I passed t' Ring o' Bells again I saw Todd and Yates still drinking there; and they shouted to me, and said, 'Come in for thy Christmas cup,' and while I was drinking it t' police came and took us all three up. T' landlady swore I'd come in t' night before with Todd and Yates, and that was true enough; but it looked bad for me, and so I hed to come here."

"I believe thou hast told me t' truth, Steve; but oh, dear me! what a fool thou hes been!"

"Thou thinks so, master, I don't doubt. God gave thee t' art o' making money; and me t' art o' playing on t' fiddle, and

understanding what t' birds are singing about ; and I can tell thee, master, they think varry little o' men and women—and t' way in general of getting on varry friendly terms wi' all nature that isn't human nature. There's some kind o' work I could do, but it isn't weaving ; however, when I get out o' this, nobody will give me weaving to do."

"Thou art wrong there. I will give thee weaving to do. I'll niver take thy loom from thee, and I hope thou wilt lay this trouble to heart and be a better man for it when ta gets back to thy work—if ta ever does get back. Hes ta heard thou hes another daughter, and that Joyce isn't doing as well as might be?"

"I heard that this morning. Poor Joyce ! And little lass, too ! It's none of her fault she's got me for a daddy. Master ! master ! look a bit after them for me, will ta ? For their sakes I'll buckle down to work when I get out, and I'll do my best ; I will that. Thou might send Joyce word I said so."

"I'll not see them want, Steve, thou may be sure ; but I do think thou is a careless, shiftless fellow. Daily work is t' varry backbone o' any life, Steve ; and till thou does it thou will niver stand up as a man should do."

In all these events Jonathan had missed Ben Holden very much. Ben had gone to Otley to spend his Christmas with his sister who lived there ; and Jonathan wondered what he would say, and was impatient for his return. He told himself that it was Ben's advice he wanted ; but really he wanted to hear Ben's praise of his own conduct.

"My word ! but Ben will be taken aback ! I wonder what-iver Ben thought when he read o' me carrying Aske home ? I think he'll be a bit proud o' me ?"

Such were his reflections when he remembered his friend, for in the course of three or four days Burley had come to be a bit proud of himself in the matter. "It isn't many men as would hev done as I did. I think I may say that much for mysen, anyway !" was a very frequent decision with him.

Ben Holden came home at the end of the holidays, and his

first words were: "Well, Jonathan, thou *hes* had a good Christmas! Very few men hev hed as grand a chance to keep it as thou hest."

"Ay, Ben, I'm glad I did it. It isn't many men as would hev done it."

Ben did not answer.

"Doesn't ta think so, Ben?"

"Nay, I don't. I think there's varry few men that wouldn't hev done just as thou did, and them few wouldn't be worth counting among men at a'. I hear Mistress Aske hes gone back to her home."

"Ay, I sent her t' night he was hurt."

"Well, now, I'll praise thee for that. It's a deal easier to do a grand thing than a just thing. Them that are joined together should learn to draw together. Not even a father hes t' right to put 'em asunder."

"Thou that reckons to know so much about wedding, why doesn't ta try it?"

"Happen I may yet. There's older men than me, I'll warrant, thinking about it."

Jonathan took no notice of this remark—perhaps it touched him too nearly—but he asked, in reply, "Has ta heard that Steve Benson is in prison about Aske's robbery?"

"I hev. Who'd hev thought that Steve would turn out such a bad halfpenny?"

"They say, 'as t' twig is bent, t' tree's inclined.' I don't know about that. I am sure Steve hed a rare good mother, and she were always trying to bend t' twig in t' right direction."

"Ay; but if t' twig is a willow twig to start wi', Jonathan, no amount o' bending will iver make it an oak. Steve hed some good points, but he never hed much backbone."

Immediately after his visit to his uncle Shuttleworth, Jonathan had very gladly posted on his mill gates this notice—"Wanted, Five Hundred Good Weavers." Most of the applicants had come from Sykes's mill, and every one who did so was sure of a favorable reception. For Burley's change of

feeling did not by any means include Sykes; he had for him, not only hatred, but also that contempt which, perhaps justly enough, every man feels for the *tools* of mischief and malice.

Sykes was confounded by this movement, especially as Matthew Rhodes declined, about the same time, "for reasons satisfactory to himself," to advance more money without Aske's direction. And Aske lay helpless on the very shoal of outermost being, far below the restless tides of money or revenge.

"I don't know whatever has happened, Hodgson," he said to his overseer; "all that was right is wrong; and the change has come that sudden, there wasn't any chance to prepare for it. Aske's illness knocks me up on one side, and Burley getting money on the other, for I'm sure Burley has got money somewhere."

"I heard tell that old Jonas Shuttleworth hed lifted Burley's quarrel; if so, Aske might as well give in. Jonas hes t' devil's own luck in a quarrel of any kind."

"Jonas Shuttleworth! Niver!"

"Ay, and besides that, I hear that he is Burley's own uncle; blood is thicker than water when it comes to t' pinch."

"It is a bad job, Hodgson."

"Ay, it is—for Sykes & Co."

"Art thou turning thy coat, too?"

"Nay, not I. I praise t' bridge I walk oover—as long as iver it carries me."

Sykes turned angrily away. Some men like to look at whatever hurts them, and Sykes, following out some internal impulse, walked down by the stream towards Burley's mill. It had already an unusual look of prosperity. Poverty and trouble have some impalpable atmosphere that their dwelling-place, even if it be a palace, cannot escape. From Burley's mill this atmosphere had suddenly vanished. Sykes was aware of a change; a change too subtle for him to understand, but he felt it. As he swaggered past the gates Jonas Shuttleworth turned the corner of the mill and came towards him.

Sykes would have passed on, but Jonas stopped him. "So

it's thee, is it? Well, well. Aske hed to go down low to find a tool! He hed that!"

"Mr. Shuttleworth, I want nothing whatever to do with you."

"Varry likely thou doesn't. But I partic'larly want to hev something to do wi' thee. In t' first place, I'll give thee notice to look out for another job. I'm thinking o' shutting up t' mill thou is running now. I hev got my thumb on t' proper screw now, and thou will find it out when thy afternoon mail comes in. Thet is a' I hev to say to thee at present." And surely enough among Sykes's letters that afternoon there was one from Matthew Rhodes, directing him to annoy Burley no further until he received orders to do so.

Jonathan was at Leeds Market that day, and perhaps Shuttleworth knew it. However, Ben Holden and the old man fraternized at once. They went through the mill together, and nothing in it escaped Shuttleworth's sharp eyes.

"It's a fine mill," he said, approvingly, "and it's well managed. It hesn't a fault but its bad neighbor. We'll hev either to own Sykes's mill or put a friend into it, Ben Holden."

"I would hev said two weeks ago that either plan was an impossibility."

"It's t' impossibilities thet always happen, Ben. If I am going to put money out I think little o' t' returns thet are probable. I'd rather risk t' improbable ones; nine times out o' ten they are t' surest. When I took hold o' Burley's affairs I thought they were in a bad fix; things hev happened since that alters them, if I'm not mistaken."

"I hear t' squire is varry low this morning."

"Poor young fellow! If he was t' worst enemy I iver hed I would be sorry for him. I like fair play above iverything, and Aske hedn't a bit of it; struck down from behind, and not a word o' warning! I don't wish his death; varry far from it. I'd a deal rather fight him honest and square, through ivery court in England. Bless thee, Ben, I hevn't a bit o' ill-will to t' men I go to law with. I could give my hand to t' most o' them I hev got damages from. But I do wish I hed known before that it was Augustus J. Sykes that was bothering Burley."

"Then ta knows him?"

"Ay, I know him. We hev hed some business together. It wasn't varry pleasant business. He owed me a sum o' money five years ago, and I sold him up. Now, when Jonas Shuttleworth sells a man up, he hes a good reason for it; be sure o' that, Ben Holden. I'm going back to Keighley now, and thou can tell Burley I was here, and that I thought well o' iverything I saw here."

But these were days in which Jonathan found it almost impossible to keep his mind upon wool and profits. A singular liking had returned to his heart for the man whom he had saved. In the first years of his acquaintance with Aske he had greatly admired the young squire, and been very proud of his connection with him. Persistently now his memory went back to those days. A few times Aske had called him "Father;" he remembered every occasion, and then, with a shuddering pity, recalled the last few imploring words he had heard him speak; his grateful glance for the mouthfuls of cold water; his own eager efforts to bind up the wounded head—the helpless, bleeding weight he had carried through the dim light of that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas-eve.

Early every day he had driven across the common to ask after his son-in-law's condition, and Eleanor had come down to him with a constantly more hopeless face. "He is worse." "He is sinking fast." "He has never recognized me." Only such sad sentences passed between father and daughter. In the parlor in which she usually spoke to him there was a full-length portrait of her, taken in the first happy days of her married life. Jonathan glanced at it one morning, and then at the pale, sorrowful woman standing below it, and he went away with a heart heavy with unavailing regrets.

"Oh, but a wrong way is a hard way! Oh, but a wrong way is a hard way!"

He said the words over and over as he drove away from the large still house, and amid the clack-a-ty, clack-a-ty of the noisy looms they kept springing to his lips.

That night, soon after he got home, there came to him a sorrowful note from Eleanor. "A few hours now," she said, "would decide the fate of her husband; and oh, father, father! pray for him!"

The entreaty spoke to Jonathan's heart like a command from God. He rose up, even from his dinner-table, and went into his own room, and, when he had locked the door, fell upon his knees, and poured out his soul anew in love and gratitude. And while he was praying the fire burned, and he washed out the bitterness of his hate in penitential tears, and in strong supplications for the life of his enemy.

There are moments in life which are at once sacrificial and sacramental—moments that are a crucible from which the soul comes out white and strong; and these were such moments to Jonathan Burley. He rose up from his knees like one of old, "justified," and with the light of divine consolation on his face. Fear was gone, and condemnation; and there was no room in his heart for anything but the love of God. He understood, then, how he that separates himself from his fellow by hatred, separates himself, also, from Christ and God, and casts himself into an abyss of diseased self-consciousness. In the abyss Jonathan now felt he must have perished of his own lovelessness, if he had not been sought by infinite compassion, and found the mercy of the Merciful One.

It was in this new strength that his eye fell upon a little book of sacred song which lay upon his table, and which had often had a word for him in due season. He opened it in the hope, and this verse answered his inquiry:

"Amidst the mighty, where is he
Who saith, and it is done?
Each varying scene of changeful life
Is from the Lord alone.

"Why should a living man complain,
Beneath the chast'ning rod?
Our sins afflict us; and the cross
Must bring us back to God."

CHAPTER XII.

BURLEY & ASKE.

“We followed Him
At other times in sunshine. Summer days
And moonlight nights He led us over paths
Bordered with pleasant flowers ; but when His steps
Were on the mighty waters—when we went
With trembling hearts through nights of pain and loss,
His smile was sweeter, and His love more dear.”

JONATHAN had suffered in more than one way by his self-willed passion. Not only had his business fallen off, his good name had also suffered. Sykes had said many unfair things of him, and had insinuated still worse. In these days it is not hard to shrug away a man’s credit, and Burley had been made to frequently smart over wrongs too intangible for a denial ; even if denial had been wise. But hard as it was to do, he had generally followed Ben Holden’s advice, and Ben always said, “Never thee chase a lie, Jonathan. It will chase itself to death. Thou can work out a good name far better than Sykes can lie thee out of it.”

And fortunately, in this world, men are not sharply divided into sheep and goats ; the good are not all good, and the evil are not all evil, for Christianity is a more complex thing than the exuberant satisfaction of Hebrew prophecy ; and it touches deeper, tenderer, and more far-sounding chords of human experience. Sad and anxious as life was to Jonathan at this time, it had its glimpses of hope and its hours of happiness ; and though Aske and Sykes had been hard to bear, their contrariness had only strengthened Ben Holden’s friendship, and drawn to him not only the sympathy and help of Jonas Shuttleworth, but also, in lesser degrees, of many others.

In a way scarcely to be explained, Jonathan realized these facts, and applied them to his own experience as he sat up that night waiting for the answer to his prayer. He had told the servants to go to bed, but none of them had done so. The two men sat with the two women in the kitchen; and they had "a bit of something warm," and as they ate, they talked—not without some genuine pity—of the young squire lying at death's door. Jonathan walked up and down his chamber, solemnly, strangely happy, and softly praying at intervals. He could not help feeling that at any moment Aske might pass beyond even his pity and forgiveness; and he was so afraid of letting any selfish thoughts influence him at that hour that he would not suffer his memory to look back a moment.

About two o'clock in the morning the message for which he had been waiting came. "Aske had been conscious; he had recognized his wife; the physicians thought his final recovery was now probable." When Jonathan read the bit of paper a great wave of gratitude came over his heart, and he said, fervently, "Thank God! thank God!" Then he laid it down and stood and looked at it. He had not yet got over the miracle of his own changed feelings. And another miracle was, that he found it difficult to recall that terrible interval during which passion had been his master instead of his slave; his memory passed it at a bound, and lingered rather among the sunshiny days of Eleanor's courtship—days in which he had thought there never was a young man so kind and gentlemanly, and withal so prudent in his affairs and positions, as Anthony Aske.

His next thought was, "Poor Eleanor!" And, indeed, Eleanor needed his sympathy. She had had to go through hours of sore trial, the very nature of which Jonathan hardly understood, and which can only be inflicted by women. On her return home she had been met by Mrs. Parsons, her house-keeper, with a polite but extreme coldness, and, though that personage scrupulously obeyed her orders, Eleanor could feel that the service was given under mental protest.

And oh, how the familiar rooms reproached her! She re-

membered with what loving lavishness Anthony had adorned them for her reception. And though she had so wickedly abandoned her home and duty he had permitted nothing of hers to be disturbed. Her rich and beautiful clothing hung in the wardrobes as she had left it. The jewels and laces she had been wearing were still lying loosely scattered over her dressing-table. Alas! alas! what sorrow and shame, what anxiety and loss, what heart-burnings and heartaches, that night's sinful passion had caused!

She took her place by her husband's sick-bed at once, and she remained there through all kinds of unspoken disapproval. Her sleepless service, her patient love, her never-wearying watch, were all doubtfully regarded. Not a servant on the place pitied her exhaustion, or believed in her affection or repentance.

"It's her jointure and her widow's right she's watching," said Mrs. Parsons, indignantly.

And it was not only the servants who held this opinion. In one form or other all of the squire's friends and retainers were sure of his wife's selfishness. Had he died, it was not improbable that they would have felt still harder towards her, and put a still darker interpretation on her devotion by his sick-bed. The Bashpooles honestly regarded her presence as suspicious and dangerous, and if the unhappy wife's positive orders and determination had not been steadily supported by the attending physicians, Squire Bashpoole would very likely have made an active and unpleasant interference.

When Anthony came to himself it was about an hour after midnight. He had been in a profound sleep for fourteen hours, and Eleanor had suffered no foot to enter the corridor in which he lay. She was cold, she was hungry, she was on the point of exhaustion, but she stirred not. In a large chair by his side she sat motionless, waiting for life or death. At length she noticed him breathe more audibly. The gray shadow gradually passed like a cloud from his face. Slowly he opened his eyes, slowly and wonderingly, as if he were just coming into a new world. They rested upon the eager, loving, sorrowful face,

breathlessly watching him. A faint smile parted his lips, and he whispered, "*Eleanor!*"

"*Anthony!*"

She bent to his wasted hands and kissed them. He felt her tears dropping upon his face. There was no need of words. In that supreme moment their souls met and understood each other.

And in less than an hour the nurse on duty had let the whole household know that "Master and Missis were friends." Then the cold cloud of doubt and suspicion in which she had dwelt so wretchedly began to part; and Eleanor soon found that the squire's pardon included that of his household. And it was pleasant to be again served with smiles and good wishes; to be sympathized with in her weariness, to have even Mrs. Parsons bring her dainty dishes of strengthening food, and insist on her taking little rests; to be, in short, thoroughly forgiven and taken into favor again.

Anthony was, for many days after his awakening, only just alive. He had been somewhere out of this real life—not *there*, not *here*—but into an awful land, a land of the shadow of death, "a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?"

"But while he lay at death's door, two strong angels took him,

And swung him in a hammock made of cloud;

With an undulating motion, from the west to east they shook him,

Lying plastic, and in mist, as in a shroud.

"They towered above the earth, as do elms above the grasses,

And even-handed, swung him to and fro;

He felt the vibrant life, and the sharp, contending passes

Of streams of air which grapple as they flow.

"The angels swung him over seas, whose sounding drums did thrill him,

And back above the homes of sleeping men;

They swung him over mountains that their piney breath might fill him,

They swept an arc from stars to stars again.

"The man lay at death's door. But the cradle of hereafter

Rocked slowly—slowly settled from its sweep.

'He has caught a broader life,' said the angels, with soft laughter;

'Let him sleep! Let him sleep! Let—him—sleep!'"

And so sleeping, he came back to earth, to health, to happiness. And never in all her life had Eleanor spent more calmly blissful hours than those in which she sat by her husband's side, watching this marvellous return.

The subject of the brutal attack on Aske, as the cause of his illness, was not named to him, and for some time after consciousness returned he did not allude to it. If remembered at all, the memory was only a part of all the hideous phantoms which had peopled the period of his delirium.

One day, about the middle of February, he was moved to a couch near the window. He had promised to sleep, and Eleanor left him alone and went to make some change in her dress. But he glanced out of the window, and suddenly the desire for sleep left him. Between the leafless trees he saw the broad, white spaces of Aske Common, and the spire of the church. In some way they touched a key of memory, which gave him back the whole scene of Christmas-eve.

Quick and vivid as a dream every circumstance passed before him. The faces of the men who attacked him—their voices, their dress, the seizure of his horse, the dreadful blow from behind; his effort to turn, to steady himself; his fall, the bitter cold, the slow, agonizing return to consciousness, the bending face of Burley, the drops of water, the encouraging words, and the strong arms whose embrace was his last remembrance—all these things he lived over again.

He had been tormented and haunted by unreal and impossible visions; but these things he knew were realities. He made an effort, and carried his memory further back—to that lonely lane, and the sad-faced woman he had met in it, and from whom he had fled in such a whirl of passions as made him a ready prey for the two cowardly assassins who had been waiting behind the wall for him. Back a little further, and with a great rush of hot blood came a vivid, chafing remembrance of his quarrel with Burley, and of the evil fruit it had brought forth.

When Eleanor returned to him, radiant in ruby-colored silk and fine lace, she was almost frightened at the expression on his

face; it was so solemn and so full of purpose—Burley had saved his life; and yet he knew not what wrongs had been done Burley while he had been unconscious. Why had his father-in-law not been to see him? It must be because he was still suffering from the oppressions he had inaugurated. How ungrateful Burley must have thought him! And ingratitude is one of those mean sins, the very suspicion of which makes a fine spirit burn with shame and resentment.

“Eleanor,” he said, gravely, “I want to see your father. Has he ever called here since—that night?”

“Oh yes; he came every morning to ask after you, until you were out of danger.”

“But not since?”

“He thought it better not, dear Anthony.”

“Yes—he thought I might not like to see the man who saved my life! My dear wife, am I so mean and contemptible? I had forgotten, that was all. This hour everything has been brought to my remembrance. Write to your father in my name. Tell him I want to see him. Tell him that I would have gone to him if I had been able.”

When Burley got the note he was just about to leave the mill. The day was nearly over; and it had been one of those fretful days, which are made thoroughly unpleasant and unprofitable by a series of small inabilities and little worries. It must be acknowledged that Jonathan was cross, and that Ben Holden was cross at him for being so.

“Here is come Aske’s groom with a letter for thee.”

“Aske’s groom! Now then, what trouble is up next?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure, Jonathan. But thou hes been making trouble all t’ day; happen it will do thee good to hev some ready-made,” and he laid the letter down at his side, and left the office.

In a few minutes Jonathan called to him. “I do believe, Ben, thou would hev liked me to hev a bit o’ fresh worry; but, my word! thou is out this time. My Eleanor says, Aske remembered me this afternoon; and he wants to see me, and says

he would hev come here if he had been strong enough to do it. What does ta think of that? Now I'm going to Aske, and we'll see what will come of it."

"Good will come of it, if thou can only put a bridle on thy tongue, and not expect to get more than thy share of thy own way."

"Thou art as cross as two sticks, Ben. Does ta think thou hes got my share o' good-sense as well as thy own? I wouldn't be as hard to get along with as thou art, for a good deal."

But in spite of sharp words, Ben helped Jonathan into his gig; and Jonathan, ere he passed out of the big gates, looked back and nodded to Ben. And as Ben trailed his long legs up the weary flights of stone steps once more, he said to himself, "Poor Jonathan! He's hed a deal to make him grumpy. If he hedn't a sweet nature he'd be sour as crab-apples by this time."

Eleanor's note had thoroughly pleased her father. Burley longed for peace, not because he had turned weak-hearted or had lost faith in himself and his claims, but because he loved Aske. Yes! he loved the man who had been driving him to ruin and despair for nearly four years. He longed to see him again. He longed to clasp his hand, and to make him feel how completely he had forgiven him.

The evening was not unlike the one on which he had seen him last, wounded, bleeding, dying. The snow still lay white and unbroken in Aske Park; the sky was flecked with cold, feathery clouds, and through the mist stealing over the landscape the lights of the many-windowed mills gleamed steadily through the bare trees on every side.

Burley had not really been astonished at Aske's message. He had expected it. He knew Aske's heart by his own. He was certain that he would be as ready to acknowledge a kindness as he was prompt to resent an injury. Still, he felt that the interview was one requiring not only great kindness, but also great prudence. Under the pressure of circumstances, calling forth all the tenderness of his heart, he must not be tempted to

resign the smallest claim of justice. "There's things he'll hev to hear, sick or not sick," he said to himself; "where I hev been wrong I'll say so, but I'll not give in where I hev been right."

Eleanor met him at the door, and his face glowed with pleasure to see her. This beautiful woman in silk and lace and jewels, with servants at her bidding, and the light of love and happiness on her face, was indeed his daughter. He put his memory of the white, sorrowful Eleanor, clothed in worn black garments, behind her for evermore. The entrance hall was in itself a beautiful apartment, with an enormous fire burning at one end, and silver sconces, filled with wax-lights, illuminating the pictures and cabinets and curiously carved old chairs with which it was furnished.

A groom was waiting for his gig, a footman in livery received his hat and overcoat; ere he was aware of it, he had fallen into the spirit of the surroundings, and, after tenderly kissing his daughter, he offered her his arm up the great staircase. It seemed a natural thing to do there, and he did it without ever reminding himself how little ceremony had been shown to Eleanor when she was a refugee wife under a cloud of social disapproval.

The squire had soon wearied of the couch and was in bed when Jonathan entered his room. He turned his large gray eyes, hollow and with the look of anguish still in them, upon him. The strong man was inexpressibly shocked at the change which had taken place. "My lad! my lad!" he said, with a pitiful solemnity, for he saw a face with the shadow of the grave yet on it, and the hand Aske stretched out was far too weak to return Jonathan's clasp.

Aske did not speak, but he looked in the broad, rosy face of his antagonist, and there was something so pathetic in the look that Burley could not resist its mute appeal.

"I am varry sorry, Aske. I am that."

"I am very sorry also, and very grateful, Burley. You saved my life."

“I am right glad I saved it.”

“I have wronged you—robbed you and wronged you!”

“Ay, thou hes. That is t’ truth about it.”

“I want to remedy the wrong as far as it is possible. Will you drop the suit? I will pay all expenses.”

“Thou can stop it to-morrow. I’ll be right glad to hev it stopped.”

“As for the damages—”

“To be sure. They hev to be considered. I hev lost a deal o’ money.”

“I will give up the new mill, with all pertaining to it.”

“Why, ta sees I hevn’t money to run both mills. If I rent it to a stranger I’ll hev trouble again.”

“Eleanor has something to say to you, father. I hope you will let her do what she wishes. It is hard to be sorry and have no tangible way to show regret in.”

“Father, I brought all this trouble on you and on Anthony.”

“Thou did. I’m glad thou hes found it out, and I forgive thee with all my heart.”

“I have made you lose more than the fifty thousand pounds you gave me as a marriage-portion.”

“I think thou hes.”

“Take the fifty thousand pounds back. If I prove myself worthy of it you can restore it when you are more able to do so.”

“Well, my lass, I like this in thee. If Aske is willing, I am. With my uncle Shuttleworth to back me and thy fifty thousand pounds I can run both mills until they run themselves. Neither Aske nor thee will lose by it in t’ end.”

“Burley, shake hands with me. From this hour it shall be ‘Burley & Aske.’ In all that is to be for your welfare, I’ll put my foot against yours. I am sure you will be true to the life you saved.”

“Before God, I will, Aske. Thou shalt be my son and my younger brother, and the man that touches thee to harm thee will hev to answer for it to Jonathan Burley.”

"I will have the proper papers made out as soon as possible. Is there anything I can do now?"

"Could thou write thy name?"

"I think I could."

"Well, then, I'll write an order to Sykes to give up all in Aske mill to me, to-morrow, and thou can sign it. He has been saying some things about me not to be borne; and I want him out of t' reach of my hand. I came varry near striking him only this afternoon."

"It is right he should go. Write the order, and I will sign it."

It would be foolish to say that Jonathan had no personal feeling in the matter. He had. He was really glad to get the better of an enemy so mean and so wicked; and it did give him a most keen pleasure to say to Ben Holden in the morning,

"Ben, get Lawyer Newby to go with thee to Sykes. Show him that bit o' paper, and give him my compliments—nay, thou needn't make any compliments about it. Just tell him Jonathan Burley says to get out o' his mill as quick as iver he can."

"My word, Jonathan! Does ta know what thou art talking about? Is ta thysen this morning?"

"I am. I am more mysen then I hev been for about four years. Man, I feel as if I hed dropped old Satan's ball and chain. It is to be 'Burley & Aske' now; now, and always, 'Burley & Aske.'"

"I am glad thou hes come to thy senses, Jonathan. God bless thee!"

"Thou always hes a snap, Ben. But don't thee be losing time. I'm in a bit of a hurry about Sykes's business. I hevn't heard t' music of my own looms for t' clatter o' his in a long time. Dear me, Ben! such a day as we are heving."

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUESTION OF DUTY.

“The romance we love best is that which we write in our own heart.”

“The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away.”

“The gods sell us all good things for labor.”

EPICHARMUS.

HAPPINESS, like sunshine, cannot be hid. As Jonathan went through his mill that day he carried the atmosphere with him. His face had the old open, straightforward look; his manner that auspicious, kindly imperativeness which so well became him. From frame to frame some intelligence passed. In a moment, in the twinkling of eyes, the thought was expressed and communicated, and unconsciously there was a quickening of work in sympathy with the mood. Jonathan did not say a word, but he wished them to feel that a better time had come; and they did feel it, and so subtle and quick are such flashes of intelligent sympathy, that the master was also quite aware his workers had comprehended his hope, and shared it.

In the upper room the one frame his eye instantly sought was empty. Sarah was absent, and he had a minute's keen disappointment. He meant to have stopped at her loom, and said, at least, “All the trouble is over, Sarah.” It was also so very unusual to find her absent that his heart felt afraid, and he went back to his office and waited anxiously and impatiently for Ben's return.

Ben came in about an hour. He had that uncomfortable habit of taking great events in a way so cool and slow as to be absolutely provoking and irritating to quicker natures. He

took off his coat and vest and began quietly to put on his big pinafore, apparently quite unconscious of Jonathan's impatience.

"Well?" asked Jonathan, with a touch of temper, "why doesn't ta say something? Did ta see Sykes?"

"Ay, I saw him."

"Well?"

"Nay, it wasn't well. It was varry far from we.l. He called me ivery foul name he could think of, and he can think of a good many; he can that."

"What did ta say then?"

"Why-a! I told him that he couldn't call me owt worse than I hed called mysen many a time; but, says I, 'Let me alone, Sykes, and look after thy own concerns a bit. For, we hev come to t' conclusion not to hev thee here another day! Thou turns out nobbut t' poorest kind of stuff, and trade is badly spoiled in this part o' t' country wi' thy poor work."

"Did ta say that? I'm glad thou said it! I *am* pleased! Good for thee, Ben—good for thee!" and Burley knocked the table emphatically with his closed fist.

"I don't think much o' mysen for saying it. It isn't more than half true. Some o' Sykes's merinos are fair enough; but I knew it would make him madder than aught else I could say, and I didn't stop to be particular. I hedn't time just then; but I hevn't felt quite comfortable since."

"What for, I'd like to know?"

"Why, ta sees, I hev another Master besides thee. And happen I hevn't pleased Him as well as I hev pleased thee. A man cannot serve two masters—God and—"

"Wait a bit, Ben; don't call me Mammon. I sent thee to Sykes because I was feared I'd say too much. Now, I'm feared thou hesn't said enough. If ta hed told him that he was a mean, contemptible rascal, and reminded him that such ways as his don't pay in t' long run, thou would hev done no more than thy duty. And I don't think much o' thee for not doing it. I didn't want thee to give railing for railing; but let me tell thee, when thy Master found t' opportunity to tell t' Scribes

and Pharisees what He thought they were, He didn't lose it. I'm sorry I left Sykes to thee, now!"

"Nay, thou needn't be. I gave him some varry plain Saxon. If ta had waited a minute, I was going to tell thee. Ben Holden isn't a man to lose any opportunity. I hed my say, Jonathan. I hev a few words I keep for such occasions, and I let Sykes hev 'em."

"Wasn't he fair capp'd at t' turn round?"

"I don't think he was. He said he knew he'd hev to go, iver since he saw owd Jonas Shuttleworth poking around here. He said Jonas Shuttleworth and t' devil were t' varry same thing."

"My word! It's well Shuttleworth didn't hear him."

"I said, 'In that case, t' devil himsen weren't half as bad as some o' his servants were.' 'Meaning me?' asked Sykes, in a passion; and I answered, 'Thou knows whose wages thou takes.' Then Newby put thy seal on all and everything, and gave orders for t' mill to stop at noon."

"Well, what does ta look so down in t' mouth for? One would think it was our mill that was to stop at noon, Ben, from t' way thou takes it."

"Nay, I don't know. But I'll tell thee one thing, Jonathan—revenge isn't half such a sweet morsel as it is said to be. There's many sins far more tempting, I should say."

"Thou knows little about it, then; and a just retribution isn't revenge, and thou oughtn't to speak in that way, and take t' varry sweetness out of it. There's no sin in a good man rejoicing in t' overthrow of t' wicked; but we'll change t' subject if it's so unpleasant to thee. I see Sarah Benson's loom is idle. Does ta know what's matter now?"

"Joyce is sick again."

"I think thou might hev dropped in and seen if ta could help them, anyway."

"Mebbe thou hesn't got all ta stock of human kindness there is in t' world! I did drop in, and I hev paid Sarah her full wage every Saturday since Steve's trouble, whether she earned

it or not. I thought if ta didn't like it I could spare t' few shillings mysen."

"Thou knew right well I'd like it. But thou art as cross as two sticks, Ben, this morning. If ta doesn't get married soon thou wilt spoil on my hands. I hev seen t' day when this morning's work would hev suited thee to a T."

Then Ben put his hand on Jonathan's shoulder, and said, "It does suit me. I am as glad as can be." And the two men looked at each other a minute in silence, and then parted with a smile full of assurance and content. It was only that they had found words too blundering a vehicle to express emotions so strong and complex. But where the tongue fails, the glance of the eye and the pressure of a hand says in a moment what many words only darken and confuse.

That day Jonathan had a great deal to do, but he could not do it. "T' work isn't quite ready for me yet," he said to Ben, and that was true enough. Aske was unable to consult with lawyers and business men about many things which could hardly be transferred or put into fresh working order without his assistance. Jonas Shuttleworth would also have to be seen again, and Jonathan felt that to gratitude he would be compelled to add both patience and prudence. It was a little trial to him. He had one of those impulsive, driving tempers that would rather climb the wall than wait for the opening of the gate; and his triumph would have been far sweeter to him if there had been no provoking preliminaries and none of the law's delay.

Still, he was a very happy man—"and going to be happier," he told himself—for in the midst of his business changes he could not help the contemplation that the road between Sarah and himself was clearing. In an unacknowledged way she had been present in all his hopes and plans, and he felt that he could not be content until he had seen her long enough to make her understand, and share the brighter prospects before them.

There was a trustees' meeting at the chapel that night. He remembered it as he was eating his dinner, and as the nearest way to the chapel was by Steve's cottage, he thought he would

go. "Perhaps he might meet Sarah. She might be at the door. He might even feel it possible to call there. He had given Steve a kind of promise which inferred some oversight of Joyce and his children ; and if Joyce was sick, it would not look remarkable for him to call and ask after her." He made these sort of excuses for a few minutes as he sat smoking after dinner; then suddenly the whole expression of his face changed. He put down his pipe with unusual decision, and as he walked rapidly up-stairs he said bluntly to himself, "I'd be an honest man if I was thee, Jonathan Burley. Go and see Sarah Benson. Thou needs no apologies. She needs none. What is ta framing excuses that are half lies for?"

He put on his best broadcloth suit, and in all other respects dressed with unusual care. And it was not altogether vanity which made him look with complaisance on his reflection in the glass, and say, "I'm a bit bald and a bit stout, and t' last four years hes made me a bit gray, but I'm a handsome man, as men go, yet, I think." Nor was the judgment a partial or flattering one. He was a handsome man ; simple, dignified, with a pleasant face, and a look of kindly shrewdness in the eyes ; a man quite worthy to win any good woman's confidence and affection.

He stopped at Steve's cottage as he went to the meeting. He had intended to wait until it was over, but he found himself unable to pass the door. Sarah turned her face towards him as he opened it, and at the sight of Jonathan she blushed crimson with pleasure. She sat at the fireside with the baby on her knee ; and the little girl whose royal name had caused such heart-burnings was spelling out a lesson beside her. Joyce was in the large chair, folded in a blanket. Her once pretty face was thin and faded, and she was in such a weak, hysterical condition that Jonathan's first kind words made her begin to cry.

"Nay, nay, woman," he said, soothingly, "t' time for tears is mainly oover now. I saw Aske last night, and we talked about t' men that tried to murder him, and he said 'he could

pick 'em out among a thousand anywhere.' And when I told him thy Steve was in prison he was varry sorry. He said, 'Steve hed nowt to do wi' t' robbery.' Now, then, don't thee cry any more."

"Master, thank thee for coming wi' such good news!" Sarah answered, her face shining with hope. "Poor Joyce, she hes been ill for weeks! She's hed a deal to cry for, and she's weak as can be."

"I'm broken - hearted! I'm dying! There niver was a woman used as Steve used me. Oh, deary me! Oh, deary me! Oh! oh! oh!"

She was sobbing and moaning with a pitiful hysteria, and Sarah, still holding the babe to her breast, stood up to soothe her; but perceiving the work was going to be difficult, she turned to Jonathan and said, "Master, thou hed better go. She's worn out, and I'll hev to get her to bed."

"Thou art worn out too, my lass!" His eyes filled with tears as he stood looking at her. "I hev something good to tell thee, though. Oh, Sarah! won't ta give me half an hour as I come from t' chapel?"

"Yes, I will that."

Under the circumstances, there was no opportunity for more words. Joyce's crying had awakened the child, and it was also crying; and Jonathan readily perceived that his presence was not in any way helpful to Sarah. But his heart was full of pity for both women—for the weak, distracted wife, wailing and moaning her life away; and for the brave, weary woman carrying a burden far too great for her strength. It was characteristic of Jonathan, however, that as soon as he entered the vestry he put his own thoughts quite away from his heart, and entered with all his old interest into the financial affairs of the circuit.

"Thou art quite like thysen, Burley, to-night," said an old friend, looking at him with a cheerful astonishment; and Jonathan answered, "The Lord hes turned again my captivity, Brother Latham; and the Lord's name be praised!"

It was a little trial for Jonathan that the brethren, rejoicing in his happiness, by a kind of friendly concert, walked part of the way home with him. At first he thought he had better not keep his engagement with Sarah. These men might wonder and talk, and he could not explain things, and so on, etc. But when they reached Steve's cottage he was ashamed that he could have been, even for a moment, such a coward. He stood still, and said, "Now, then, I'll bid you all 'good-night.' Here's Steve Benson's cottage, and I hev got a word or two to say there."

The little house-place was now quiet. Joyce and the children were asleep, and Sarah was sitting by the table mending some of their clothing. Jonathan sat down by her side. He took the work out of her hands, and then held them in his own. Such dear hands! Hands so ready to help! So gentle with the sick and the children! So busy in every unselfish work! "Oh, Sarah!" he said, and his voice was low and broken with emotion—"oh, my dear lass, t' days of our trouble are oover. Aske and me have made up friends. He hes given up t' lawsuit, and sent Sykes about his business; and he is going to make oover t' new mill to me. What does ta think of that?"

As he spoke he bent towards her, and her face was lifted to him. He saw how the news changed it, how the wan cheeks grew rosy and the sad eyes bright, and how the patient mouth parted with a happy smile. And before she could speak, he had bent still lower, and kissed the words off her lips.

"Nay, nay," he added, "don't thee be a bit vexed at me. I couldn't help it, my dearie; and I hev waited varry patient, Sarah; now, then, how soon will ta marry me?"

"Dear master, how can I leave these three little childer—nay, then, there are four o' them, for Joyce is just as fit for nothing? Thou must wait until t' right time comes."

"If ta knew, Sarah, how it pains me to see thy white, half-clemmed face! How can I be happy, and thou so miserable?"

"Nay-a, not miserable; nobody is that who is doing the thing they ought to do."

"But Steve will get off. There isn't a doubt o' that. Squire Aske was as sorry as could be when he heard of Steve being in prison."

"I wonder how Squire Aske knew our Steve?"

"He told me how. He said one day he was coming through Denham Woods, and he met Steve, and t' lad showed him an orchid he hed just found; and t' squire gave Steve a guinea for it. I don't know what an orchid is, my lass, but it's nowt wrong, I'm sure; happen, it's a bird o' some kind."

"Nay, it's a flower. I remember Steve telling me about it; he said it was like a spider; a varry curious flower it must be."

"Then Aske got into a talk with Steve, and he told Steve he would like him to get t' nests and t' eggs of all the kinds of birds that iver he could find; for it seems Aske has a fancy to mak' a collection of them. He offered t' lad ten shillings for ivery nest with t' eggs in it, and more if t' nest was an uncommon kind. But Steve wouldn't tak' t' offer, not he! He said 'He would count himsen no better than a thief and a murderer if he took t' nest of any brooding bird, and that he'd far rather hev t' good-will of t' robins and finches than of the biggest man in t' county.'

Sarah smiled, and answered, with a tone of decided approval, "That was just like Steve. Poor, kind-hearted lad!"

"Ay, t' squire smiled when he told me; and he said it would be a varry unlikely thing for a man like Steve to turn out a blood-thirsty, thieving blackguard."

"He is so good, and he is so bad, master, I'm fair puzzled with him."

"He has promised me to do better, and I have promised him no one should take his loom from him. And, Sarah, it's not unlikely that t' prison hes taught him that he can manage to live without tramping up and down from one week end to another. And get a lesson sure-ly, about 'taking up' with iverybody that speaks pleasant to him. So, then, when Steve is

settled to work again, what is there to hinder? Be my wife, and come to thy home."

"I'll say one thing. Just as soon as Steve is doing well, I'll count the promise I made my mother fulfilled. But she set me a charge and I hev to keep it. I couldn't be happy, not even with thee, if I ran away from my duty."

"It's a varry hard one, Sarah."

"Thou's wrong there. Love makes hard things easy, and I love my mother yet, and I love Steve dearly! Hev a bit more patience. I won't hev my happiness till I can ask God's blessing on it. I must wait for t' right time; and I must be sure it is t' right time."

"Then, Sarah, I'll wait as patient as iver I can, till thou art sure. But oh, lass, how I love thee! Thou art dear as my own life to me!"

She blushed with pleasure, and voluntarily put her hand in his. "In a little while," she said. "T' shadows are beginning to brighten, and now thou wilt see how fast t' daylight will come. When t' right hour strikes, thee and me will both know it, and I'll be thy wife gladly, and I'll try to make ivery hour of thy life happy."

Jonathan was far too full of joy to speak for a few minutes, and when he did find words they were of that practical kind which would probably shock a young lover, who imagines that love has no element but one of poetry and romance. "Sarah," he said, "if ta was by thysen, cr if it was for thysen, I'd niver dare to offer thee a halfpenny, though all I have is for thee. But for that poor weakly creature and her childer thou must let me do something till Steve is able to work again."

"Ben Holden hes brought my wage."

"Thy wage isn't enough. It isn't half enough. It is for them, not thee. Take it, lass, and get Joyce some strengthening food, and t' childer some shoes and clothes. As for Steve's defence, he won't need much defending, but I hev spoken to Newby. He'll say all for t' poor lad that is necessary; and so, thou needn't hev a care about t' trial. It will clear Steve when-iver it is."

Jonathan's hopeful assertions proved in the outcome to be true ones also. When Squire Aske was carried into the court on the day of the trial, he positively asserted that only two men attacked him. He said he had noticed these two as they climbed the wall; he described their dress, and without hesitation selected the guilty men. And in Steve Benson's behalf he spoke so warmly that his full and honorable acquittal was the immediate result of the legal investigation.

But there was a social tribunal which Steve could not so easily satisfy. He returned home with a determination to do his duty; to be industrious at his loom and affectionate to his family. On the morning when he went back to the mill, Sarah walked by his side, and Jonathan took care, as soon as all the hands were at work, to stop at Steve's loom, and to talk to him with marked interest and kindness concerning the "piece" he was setting up. Steve Benson, however, had not many friends among his own class. A drunken, noisy scamp who beat his wife and fought the constables they could have understood and felt some sympathy for; but a man like Steve, who spent days hunting a queer flower, or rambling on the sea-sands after weeds and shells, and who filled his pockets like a school-boy with "trash," was, in their opinion, a man who was either silly or wicked, and very likely a little of both.

Besides, as Jim Hardcastle said, "If Steve Benson hed hed a bit o' human natur' in him, he'd hev given his mates an even-ing at t' public-house, and told 'em all as he'd gone through, and stood a quart apiece for 'em; for as iverybody knew, both t' squire and t' master hed put their hands in their pockets for him."

So Steve was made to feel from the first hour of his return that he was not "one of them." A score of times a day this knowledge was forced upon him. Some of the coarser men and women had a gibe ever ready; others shifted away from his presence in silence, or else made that presence so passively unpleasant that Steve quickly shifted away from it. The trial was borne bravely for a few days, for he hoped to live it down.

But petty injustices and mean slights are not of that class of evils; on the contrary, they have all the despicable persistence of a fly; and, however often pushed away, return again and again to the contemptible attack.

Steve was almost appalled by such an invincible dislike. He knew how impossible such persecution would have been to himself, and, therefore, measuring it by this personal standard, it assumed proportions that he felt to be hopelessly beyond his power to surmount. Every day he grew more and more miserable and apathetic. He shrunk from this adverse human contact, and yet felt obliged to meet it. It was an actual martyrdom to the sensitive man, and its effect upon Sarah was equally painful and distressing. Before a month had passed she felt that the ordeal was too cruel, and that something must be done to make it unnecessary, for Steve was really in a greater danger than ever he had been before—the danger of a hopeless, subjugated heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHADOWS GROWING BRIGHTER.

“No life is waste in the Great Worker’s hands.”

“The thought of her came like a small bird winging the still, blue air.”

“I went down into the garden to see whether the pomegranates budded.”

—*Song of Solomon*, vi. 11.

It was a painful thing to do, but a woman’s love, if it be true love, never fails. Sarah went again to Jonathan. It was easy to make him understand how Steve stood in his own little world. Jonathan knew the men and women that composed it; knew their virtues and their faults, and he perceived that Steve had become an outcast from it. To tell the truth, he had not much hope of Steve; but he could not resist Sarah’s anxious face, and the tears in her sorrowful eyes.

“Let him have a fair chance, master, to put his good resolutions into practice,” she pleaded; and after some debate America was chosen as the place for a fair chance. America was a boundless possibility. Very little else was known about it, even by Jonathan. But Steve was charmed. There was the voyage, and then the vast unknown beyond the voyage; surely, at least, there were limitless opportunities for something good to turn up. He was gay with hope and full of promises, and Sarah believed in them, although the thoughtless candidate for fortune had not one definite plan as to how he was to redeem them.

He intended going to Canada, but he made some mistake in Liverpool, and bought a ticket for New York. But how often some wiser power takes in hand at last the life we have rough-hewn on every side, and shapes it to its proper end. Half-way

across the Atlantic the key to Steve Benson's character was found. Either because a sailing-vessel was more economical, or because he wanted to prolong the voyage, Steve had selected a ship of a famous merchant line. For eight days they were driven before a series of storms, and when all hope appeared to be over, and the crew refused any longer to obey orders, Steve went naturally to his right place.

He was the captain's main reliance. Things that appeared impossible for a landsman to do he did easily, by some natural gift or instinct. His spirits and courage rose with the storm, rose above it, and the man who had been a coward among wheels and bands and pulleys knew only an exultant joy in his conflict with the winds and waves. When almost in extremity they met a steamer which took them into port; but the first step on the right road had been taken by Steve Benson, for ere they landed the captain said to him,

“What is your trade, young man?”

“I am a weaver, sir.”

“And your father?”

“A weaver also; but my grandfather sailed forty years in the Whitby whaling ships—”

“I thought so! You are a born sailor. Nature made you to sail a ship, and your father tethered you to a loom. That's the way people steer on wrong tacks, and then wonder they run upon reefs and sand-bars. Will you leave the loom and take the helm with me?”

“I'll do so gladly, captain.”

This was the beginning of a new life to Steve. It was almost as if in that stormy passage he had been born again. He threw the past and all its dreamy discontent behind him. He never wanted in this new work to be idle. He put into it his whole soul, and duty was delight. The captain watched him with pleasure and astonishment, and wondered at the marvellous transition. For it was not only in his mental aptitudes that the born sailor was manifest; as soon as Steve put on the blue flannel of the seaman he looked as if he was in his natural

clothes. He kicked his corduroys over the side of the vessel, and buried his mill memories with them fathoms deep in the tossing ocean.

It must be acknowledged that at first Jonathan thought little of the enthusiastic hopes of Sarah for her brother in his new life. "It's this and it's that," he muttered, "and the newest thing is the best thing; but he'll never be worth the shoe-leather he'll wear out." And it was not unreasonable that he should feel hopeless of Steve, and also a little hard towards him. For so many years he had stood between Sarah and himself; and though he could not blame Sarah for her sisterly devotion, he did blame Steve for requiring it. He was very well pleased when the American proposal was made. He had often thought of it, but he felt that it would be impolitic for him to be the one to propose the lad's exile. He might be accused of selfish motives, and if Steve were unsuccessful he was sure that Sarah would only cling the closer to him.

Still, it made him happy to see her at her loom with such a cheerful face; and as the weeks went by, and it grew brighter and brighter, he began to look into the eyes he loved with that hopeful lift of the eyelids which asked her as plainly as words could have done, "*When?*" And though he was so busy that he hardly took time for sleep, he was always conscious of a joy far below the restless tides of daily labor and daily care.

After the wonderful reconciliation between Aske and himself he went at once to see his uncle. Jonas Shuttleworth had been shrewd enough to anticipate the effect of that Christmas-eve upon his nephew's business. He was not astonished when he heard there would be no lawsuit, and yet, in spite of a sensible satisfaction, he was a bit disappointed.

"I hope I am Christian enough to be glad thou hes made it up with thy son-in-law," he said to Jonathan; "but, my word! it was as nice a case as iver I could wish to see! I hed t' defence all thought out, and I hed got things in my mind up to t' tune of ten thousand pounds damages. But if thou art satisfied, why then I ought to be, I'm sure. Now then, what

will ta do with both mills? They'll be a bit of a charge to thee."

"I'll tell thee. Eleanor hes offered me t' loan of her marriage-portion, and that will make Burley mill run smooth until it runs itself clear."

"Why-a! That *was* good in t' lass! But what will Aske say to it?"

"He put Eleanor up to it, I hev no doubt; for Eleanor never hed a plan about money, if it wasn't for t' spending of it. But she was glad of the thought, and they were both as nice as niver was about it."

"He can't be a bad chap—Aske."

"He's a varry good one. He's a good hater, and a good lover; and men of that kind suit me. You know where you hev them. Squire Bashpoole always lifted his hat, and spoke politely in t' worst o' t' ill-will; but I knew he hated me, and I thought a deal worse of him for his civility. He'd hev been more of a man if he hed kept his beaver on, and passed me without a word."

"Now, then, about t' other mill?"

"Ay, suppose thou runs it?"

"I know nowt o' running mills."

"Money knows everything."

"Varry true. I'll tell thee what: I'll find t' money, and thou put Ben Holden in as manager. It shall be Burley & Co., and I'll be t' 'Co.'"

"Ben hes been my right hand for many a year."

"Then it's time thou was thy own right hand. Run thy mill as well as iver thou can, and Ben and I will 'best thee,' I hevn't a doubt."

"I shouldn't wonder."

But it was finally settled thus, and Ben was highly delighted at the proposal. Still, there were necessarily many irritating delays, especially as Aske did not recover as rapidly and thoroughly as had been hoped. And machinery was to examine, and books to go over, and stock to take, and the lock to re-

move, and bills to call in and to satisfy, and a hundred things to attend to, which kept not only Jonathan but the "Co." as busy as possible.

In the early summer Squire Bashpoole and his family returned from Italy. Jonathan was made aware of this fact by meeting the squire one morning going to Aske as he was returning from an early call upon his son-in-law. At this meeting Bashpoole forgot the courtesy Burley had complained of. On the contrary, he accosted him with a blunt anger, whose spirit was unmistakably rude.

"Jonathan Burley," he said, "let me tell you I think it a great misfortune that my nephew ever had anything whatever to do with you or your family. You are a low set, sir—low, both in your liking and your revenge. That is my mind about you!"

"Well, I didn't ask thee for thy mind," answered Burley, "and I don't care a jot for it now thou hes given it to me. But I'd a deal rather know it, and hev it, than I'd hev thy civil words, which niver did mean aught. In t' future, though, don't thee speak to me at all. I want nowt of thee, not even thy mind. Morning, sir."

He could not make up his mind to say "*good*" morning. "I don't see," he muttered, "why I should lie for him, and I don't wish him a good-morning;" and he flicked his whip angrily as he drove with unusual rapidity to the mill. He found Jonas Shuttleworth already there, and going over his own mail with great apparent satisfaction. As Jonathan entered he lifted a letter, and shook it with a gentle, triumphant motion.

"It's from Squire Bashpoole," he said; and then he chuckled to himself as he looked at his nephew.

"Why-a! I hev just hed a few words with him. I told thee his civility was all shoddy. He at me this morning like a bully, and he gave me some varry uncivil words indeed."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he said my family was a low set."

"Did he? Niver mind, Jonathan. He'll hev to pay heavy

for ivery ugly word. If he likes to buy 'em at our price neither thee nor me need grumble."

"What is he writing to thee about?"

Shuttleworth smiled queerly as he answered, "Why, it's about my soap factory. T' boiling-vats were put in on Saturday, and he *was* mad. He got into his fine carriage and came down on me, horses and livery and all. His big footman rapped with his silver-headed stick at my door as if he'd come to tell me Queen Victoria was waiting outside. I hed seen him coming, for I hed been expecting t' visit; but I sat still at my fireside, and when t' man knocked I shouted to him to 'Walk in.' He didn't do it, though, till he got tired o' knocking, and then he says, 'Squire Bashpoole wants to see you, sir.' 'I've no objections,' says I; 'tell him to come in.' 'Sir?' says he. 'Tell him to come here,' I answered, and by t' way I spoke he knew I meant something. So t' squire comes marching in as if he hed looked at my property, and liked it and meant to buy it; and I said, 'Well, squire, thou can sit down if ta likes.'

"'I won't sit down, Mr. Shuttleworth; and what are you building opposite my park?' he asked.

"'Why, ta sees,' I told him, 'there's a sight o' wool mills round here, and I'm building a soap factory; it's sure to pay.'

"'Pay!' he bellowed. 'It's an outrage! It's a nuisance! It ruins my property! It's close upon my park walls!'

"'Ay,' I said, 'thy park walls hes long been an outrage and a nuisance. My tenants don't like looking at a brick wall spring, summer, and winter.'

"Then he went on like a Turk and Tartar, and I smoked my pipe and looked in t' fire as comfortable and pleasant as could be; and I niver answered him a word until he said he'd 'find law enough in England to punish me.' Then I told him 'there would happen be as much law for me as for him.' 'It's a monstrous injustice!' cried he; and I laughed, and answered that 'law and justice weren't quite t' same thing, but that law was quite good enough for two men like him and me. And,' I added, 'there's a bit o' land of mine left beyond t' soap factory,

and I could dig some tanning vats in it, and build some skin-drying sheds ; and though it's a dirty business, I don't mind where gold comes from if it only comes to my purse, not I.' And then he went fuming out, and swore himsen into his carriage ; and, to tell t' honest truth, Jonathan, I don't blame him. I'd hev done about t' same thing mysen."

Jonathan listened with a grave face. "I'm sorry, uncle. I don't mind Squire Bashpoole, nor what he says to me nor of me ; and I hope you won't spend your money and annoy yourself in such a cause. I bear no ill-will to Squire Bashpoole."

"I do. And it isn't thy quarrel I'm fighting with him. He knows what he is being punished for ; though the wrong is as old as thou art. When I gave him a look t' other day, he knew that look meant '*Mary Sorley*,' and not Jonathan Burley. I hev given him a good lot of whippings on that old score, and mebbe I wouldn't hev brought it up again but for t' way he hes talked about my grandniece, Mistress Aske. Thou let him and me alone. There's nobody knows t' ins and t' outs of our quarrel but oursens. What was thou at Aske's so early for to-day ?"

"Why, Aske is varry badly. He doesn't get well ; and Eleanor sent for me last night. T' doctors think he ought to go to London or Paris, and see some great men—I've forgotten t' names—and Eleanor wanted me to persuade him to take t' advice given him. He looks varry thin and white, and he suffers a deal. But it is t' queerest thing how he hes taken to me ; not but it is just as queer to feel how I hev taken to him. I felt fit to cry this morning to see him so bad off."

"Jonathan, I'll take it kind of thee if ta will go with t' poor young man and thy daughter. Thou is needing a rest far more than thou thinks for. Thou hes a fever most of t' time ; and thou art as worritty as a woman. Ben and I can take care of iverything ; and if ta will forget t' mills for a few weeks, and give thysen up to spending money, and larking like a boy, thou wilt add twenty years to thy life."

And probably there was in Jonathan's consciousness a conviction of the necessity for some such relief ; for after a slight

opposition he gave in to his uncle's proposal, almost gladly ; especially when he saw how pleased Eleanor was and felt the grateful clasp of Aske's thin hand.

This event occurred about the end of July ; a little more than two months after Steve's departure for America. Things had become much better in his cottage. Joyce was well, and growing almost pretty again, in the brighter prospects before her. Steve wrote her beautiful letters. He sent her money ; he told her he was making a little home for her in New York, and that very soon it would be ready. And Joyce took kindly to the idea. She had been so poor and wretched that she did not feel as if she ever could hold up her head again among her own people ; and her imagination had also been filled with Steve's account of the bright, breezy city of the New World, and its freer, broader life, and its wonderful school advantages for the children. So that Sarah's hopefully prophetic words to her lover—"the shadows have begun to brighten"—seemed to be coming more and more true with every passing week.

As for Sarah, her cheerful face and light step had told Jonathan so much, but he felt that he could not go abroad with Aske until he had had some confidential intercourse with her. On the last day that he purposed being at the mills, before leaving, he stopped at her loom. Jonas Shuttleworth was with him, but he had lingered at a loom lower down, and in the few moments' interval Jonathan bent over her work, and said, "I am going away, my lass, for three months, happen for more. I must see thee first. Where will ta be at nine o'clock to-night?"

"I'll be at the stile to Barton Woods."

"I'll be there, too—wet or fine."

Then Jonas joined him. Both men stood and watched Sarah's work for a few minutes, and then passed on. But all day Jonathan had the wonderful sense of having an appointment with Sarah. It made him feel like a young man. He could scarcely eat his dinner ; and Jonas noticed his want of appetite as a new and an ominous symptom of his need of rest and recreation.

"I'll tell thee what, nephew, thou hes eat nothing at all, and when a man quarrels with his bread and meat, there's something varry far wrong with him. Thou said thou was going out to-night; don't thee do it; a man that doesn't eat his victuals isn't fit to put his head out in t' night air."

But Jonathan said he had a friend to see, and the old man made no further opposition to his night walk. He went nervously up-stairs, and dressed himself, and then slowly took his way through the sweet-scented park, full of the perfume of bleaching grass and of a thousand wild flowers. There was no moon, but there was an exquisite gloaming, and myriads of bright shining stars; and the whole influence of the night was singularly sweet and tender.

Lovers outrun the clock, if they be true lovers, and Jonathan was at the tryst before nine. But he sat down at the stile, and smoked, and thought, and was very, very happy. Just before nine he arose, and looked up and down the road. He could see either way for half a mile. Sarah was not visible. Then she was coming through the wood, and with a still, sweet thrill of expectation he went to meet her. In a few moments she appeared, and oh, how fair and sweet she looked in the dim path with the green, arching trees above her!

He took her hands and clasped them in his own. "My own dear wife! Thank thee for coming!" He drew her firmly to his side, and he almost whispered the words over again, because it seemed far sweeter to say them in a voice so low that it compelled him to bend down to her dear face in order to make himself understood. And then their feet were upon enchanted ground, and knew a joy more sweet and pure than any hearts can comprehend, save those that have been tried by sorrow and strengthened by self-abnegation. It was no green harvest of unripe love, hastily gathered by impatient youth before the ears are full and golden. In Barton Wood, Sarah and Jonathan had one hour of sweetest confidence, in which the future was discussed in all the glowing hopes of purest and truest love.

When it was time to part they came to the open road, and

Jonathan looked at his love with a fixed and tender gaze. He wanted to firmly impress upon his mental vision the picture of the beautiful woman he so dearly loved. She had only a lilac print dress on, with a white broidered kerchief about her neck; but oh, how sweet and womanly she looked! And oh, what wells of truth and affection were the handsome gray eyes she lifted to Jonathan's face!

"We must part here, dear Jonathan," she said, softly.

"Nay, not we. I'll see thee safe home," and she had not the heart to say him nay. So, walking happily side by side through the little village, they said their last hopeful words to each other. At the cottage gate he kissed her and blessed her, and left her with eyes full of tender tears. And she stood and watched him to the street corner, where he turned and waved his hand in a final adieu. Still she stood. The air was so warm and balmy, and the stars so bright, and she was so happy. And when the thoughts are thoughts of love, time goes so swiftly to their drifting. Sarah had been dreaming half an hour at the little gate when she heard a footstep. "That is Ben Holden's step, I'll warrant," she thought, and in a moment Ben came round the corner.

"Thou art late out, Sarah," he said, with a queer smile.

"So art thou, Ben. Hes ta been a-courting?"

"Thou knows better than that. I'm up to no such foolishness! I was at t' Odd Fellows' meeting to-night. Does ta know t' master is going away?"

"Ay, I know it. Aske and him are varry friendly after all that hes come and gone."

"Aske and Burley are thick as thack, and as for Mistress Aske, she rules 'em both. She hes sense enough now to call her orders 'wishes,' that's about all t' difference, lass. It caps me! Men-folk are that easy fooled I often wonder women can look in their faces without laughing at 'em."

And Sarah laughed softly in Ben's face and turned happily away.

CHAPTER XV.

BEN HOLDEN'S MARRIAGE.

“ All love is sweet,
Given or returned. Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.

* * * * *

They who inspire it most are fortunate
As I am now; but those who feel it most
Are happier still.”—SHELLEY.

ONE beautiful morning in August Ben stood at the big door of the new mill. He was its manager, and he felt to the utmost the importance of his position. Every loom was at work in the building, which was a very handsome stone structure, white inside as lime could make it, and as airy as a birdcage. The multitude of clicking, clacking sounds were the sweetest music to him; and he was seriously debating with himself as to the necessity of working “over-hours” in order to fill requisitions in fair time. Never had Ben felt so little like “bothering with women-folks” as that very moment, and perhaps it was for this reason Cupid sent little Nelly Lewthwaite Ben’s way. Nelly was a slip of a lass, not seventeen years old, and though Ben had a consciousness that some such human being was crossing the yard, he was looking far beyond her, until she stood at his side, and, dropping a courtesy, said, “Master Holden, I’d like to work for thee.”

Ben looked down at her, and his stern face softened all over. She had the wonderful Lancashire eyes, with bands of rippling brown hair above them, and a small mouth, bow-shaped and rosy.

“Why, then, thou shall work for me,” he answered, kindly. “Where does ta come from? Thou art none of our folk.”

"I come from Manchester way."

"Ay, for sure. Are thy folk with thee?"

"I have none, master. Father and mother died last year with t' fever—thou would hear how bad it was?"

And she looked sadly down at her black dress, and touched a bit of crape at her throat.

"Hes ta no brothers and sisters?"

"I hed; but they got married, and wedding changed 'em some way. They couldn't be bothered wi' me after it."

"That's like enough. Where is ta staying?"

"I've got a nice place to stay. I'm with Sybil Johnson. She used to work with my mother."

"Sybil is a good woman. See thou bides with her, and does what she tells thee to do, then thou won't go far out of thy way. What can ta do in a mill?"

"I can either spin or weave."

"I'll give thee a loom to-morrow morning."

"Why, thank thee, master. Sybil said thou was a kind man. I'm glad I came to thee."

Then Nelly, with a smile, went away, and Ben Holden bothered his head about her more than enough. Her childish, confiding manner had touched the spring of Ben's heart, and set the door wide open for her.

All day her innocent face and bright eyes were constantly before him; and he felt as if the pretty, girlish form was at his side as he went up and down the mill. Then he worried himself for not having set her to work at once. She might be tempted to go to some other mill, and find a master who would not be as just and kind to her as he intended to be.

"A poor little orphan lass among strangers," he kept saying to himself. "A poor little lass, and nobody to say a kind word to her." And though this consideration for a pretty girl was such an unusual, such an absolutely new thing to Ben, he had not a suspicion of what had really happened to him.

In the morning he watched anxiously for Nelly, and was pleased to see her among the first arrivals. He took her him-

self to her loom. It made him happy to find the bonny childish form mounting the steps at his side. He felt a constant temptation to cast his eyes down at the eyes lifted to him. And such little bits of hands as Nelly had! Ben touched them almost pitifully. "Only to think of themhev-
ing to work for a living! Poor little lass! No friends to care for her! Poor lass! poor lass!"

All day such reflections ran through his mind, and towards afternoon he went to Sarah and told her about Nelly. "She's nobbut an orphan child among strangers, Sarah, and I look to thee to see after her a bit," he said. "There's so many ways, thou knows, for a little one to be led out of t' right road."

He was pleased to see that Sarah had found the "little one" before leaving the mill; for he saw them go out of the gates together, and he was disappointed Nelly did not look his way. Yet he knew that was a thing he had no right to expect, and one which he would not have expected from any other hand.

However, Sybil Johnson was a woman whom he knew well; for, in spite of her poverty, she was a somewhat important person in the chapel, since it was generally Sybil who nursed the sick of the congregation, and who performed the last offices for the dead. But when Ben remembered this fact it troubled him. Necessarily, Sybil had to be much from her own home, and then Nelly would be left alone. A sudden fear made him heart-sick. She was such a pretty, gentle little lamb, and there were so many wolves about in the shape of handsome mill lads. He honestly felt as if it was his particular duty not only to warn Sybil of this danger, but also to take some charge in the matter himself.

It was not long before he found an opportunity, and he called at Sybil's cottage. It was a Saturday evening—a lovely, warm August evening, with a full moon in the clear blue sky. Sybil was ironing by the fading daylight, and Nelly was sitting beside her, trimming her bonnet with a new ribbon. Ben had come to tell Sybil of a lad who had got hurt, and wanted her care

a bit; and as Sybil would be away for a couple of hours, Ben asked Nelly to take a walk with him. He had put on a handsome suit, and he was not at all a bad-looking fellow, tall and well-made, with a large, pleasant face, a little pock-marked. Nelly was glad of the walk, and she made herself so charming that before they parted Ben had sought and obtained permission to call for her on his way to chapel the next evening.

"A poor little orphan lass." He was never done making this apology to himself; and taking it as an excuse for going every other night to see if Nelly was comfortable; for going with her to chapel on Sundays, for fear she might neglect her duty; for seeing that she went walking on the moor frequently, lest the hot air in the mills should make the roses in her cheeks fade away; for going with her to Morecambe sands on half-holidays, lest she might go there in company not so good for her as his own. He was completely captive before he even suspected that he was on dangerous ground; and never was there a man so foolishly, so completely, so thoroughly in love as Ben Holden.

Now there was a pretty house near by the new mill. Aske had built it for Sykes, and it was now owned by Jonathan. As soon as Ben had a revelation touching the condition of matters between his heart and Nelly Lewthwaite, he wrote to Jonathan about this house. "I want to buy it," he said; "it is near the mill, and handy to live in; and I have got a notion in my head to furnish and have a house of my own, if thou will sell it."

The proposition seemed a very natural one to Jonathan. He reflected that Ben had now a very responsible and important position; that he was far from being poor; and that a man who is not a householder is very like a nobody, no matter how rich he is. The sum Ben offered for the house was a fair one; not too much, not too little; and Jonathan was glad to be able to please so old and dear a friend.

"Thou can have the house and welcome," he wrote, "at thy own price; and I am glad above everything that thou art

thinking of a home of thy own. Married or not married, home is a full cup. I wish thou would get thee a wife, Ben; there are a lot of women good enough, if thou could only think so; but I am feared thou will never be wise enough for that." And Ben laughed grimly when he thought how astonished Jonathan would be.

As soon as the house was his own, he went into Leeds and had a consultation with a firm whose business it was to know just what things were necessary and pretty for such a home. He had sense enough to leave it entirely to them; and as the principle between Ben and all tradesmen was ready cash, and full value for it, the furnishing was perfectly and suitably done.

And perhaps he had never had happier hours than those which he first spent in his own home. The neatly-served meals in his own parlor, the smoke by his own fireside, the rest in his own handsome bedroom, were a new revelation of solid comfort to him. Besides, there was upon the parlor hearth-rug a pretty American rocking-chair, with a cushion of blue damask, and bows and trimmings of blue satin ribbon on it; and though it was yet vacant, Ben had a vision of a bonny young orphan lass in it, and this vision made it the pleasantest kind of object to look at.

On the Saturday afternoon, following his own occupation, he called for Nelly Lewthwaite, and took her for a long walk over Aske Common. When her feet began to weary, and he saw that she was tired and hungry, he led her to his house, and said as he pointed it out, "Come thy ways in, and let my house-keeper give thee a cup o' tea. She was making cheese-cakes when I left, and they smelled good enough to make a body hungry. Come, Nelly, will ta?"

"Would ta like me to come in a bit?"

"What is ta teasing me for? Thou knows I would like nothing better."

"Then I'll hev a cup o' tea and some cheese-cakes. I'm as fond as a child o' them, and I'm hungry, too."

"Why, thou isn't much more than a child. So come thy

ways in, and eat as many as iver thou can. I hev just bought t' house, and I'd like some woman like thee to tell me if it is furnished as it ought to be."

The house-keeper received Nelly a little stiffly. She had a shrewd idea as to Ben's intentions, and yet she felt that there was nothing to be gained by opposing them. So she took Nelly up-stairs to remove her bonnet, and made her notice the fine blue and crimson damasks of which the furnishings of the best rooms were composed; the bright chintzes of the others; the soft thick carpets and rugs; the ruffled pillow-shams and the dressed toilet-tables; and all these things filled Nelly's young heart with astonishment and longing.

But she forgot even these splendors when she was introduced to the parlor, with its fine lace curtains and blue velvet upholstery. And the table was set with gilded china, and fine damask, and real silver forks; and for the first time Nelly realized how much better veal pies and raspberry tarts and cheese-cakes may taste with such accessories. It was a wonderful meal to her. She was yet young enough to be delightfully hungry, and honest enough to enjoy with childlike gusto the good things her lover had provided.

After tea was over, Ben sat down for his smoke; and while the house-keeper removed the china, and "tidied up" after the little feast, Nelly sat opposite him, in the rocking-chair, her curly brown head lying comfortably and coquettishly among the blue satin trimmings. Ben thought it the very prettiest object he had ever looked at in all his life, and as Nelly chattered away about her past life, and he smoked, a sense of something serenely, sweetly, deliciously happy seemed to fill the room, and made him loath to speak or move.

But he felt that this hour was his opportunity, and that he must not lose it. In a moment's pause, as Nelly rocked softly backward and forward, and appeared to be as lost in thought as himself, Ben stooped forward and touched her hand. "Nelly, my dear," he said, "what does ta think of t' house?"

"It's a beautiful house. I niver saw a house that was half

as fine as this is. Even t' kitchen is perfect. There's nowt at all wanting in it; only if ta hed a nicer house-keeper."

"Ay, I want a nicer house-keeper; thou is just right about that."

"For I like thy teas, and I'd like to come again; but I could see she didn't think much o' me, and I didn't think much o' her."

"Thou can send her packing to-morrow if ta likes to do so, Nelly. This house is thine, and so is iverything in it, if ta like to hev it and keep it."

"Is ta asking me to marry thee, Ben?"

"That is what I mean, Nelly. Thou will hev to take me with t' house. Will I be varry hard to take?"

"Nay, I don't think thou will. Nobody was iver so good to me as thou hes been. I couldn't help liking thee, even if I tried to, and I'm none going to try—now;" and Nelly smiled bewitchingly and put her hands in Ben's. And then Ben took her in his arms, and sealed her promise with a kiss.

It is quite characteristic of late lovers that they love extravagantly and impatiently. Ben was for being married the next day. "I am ready," he said, "and t' house is ready, and what's to hinder, dear lass?" he asked. "I am not ready," answered Nelly, "not quite." "It is such a busy time," pleaded Ben. Nelly said "they could wait till business was slack." Ben had found out "that he did not like his house-keeper." Nelly said "he could easily get another." "He was so lonely." Nelly asked why he had never found that out before? Then at last the truth came out. Nelly would not be married without a wedding-dress. That was an objection Ben did not understand very well, and did not know how to oppose. He tried to persuade Nelly "no dress could make her look prettier than the one she had on;" but she answered, with a bewitching little nod, "Wait and see." So that night Ben got, quite unconsciously, his first lesson in marital obedience. He was obliged to wait, not a day, nor a week, but a whole month—a month during which, he admitted to Jonas Shuttleworth, "the world seemed upside down to him."

Shuttleworth laughed. Old as he was, he had not quite outgrown some youthful sympathies, and he took Ben's proposed marriage in a way Ben had hardly expected.

"There's two things I like about thy wedding, Ben," he said, "one is—thou hast built thy nest before thou went a-mating. Second is—thou hes chosen a bird of thy own feather. Bless thee, lad! Marrying is easy enough, it is house-keeping that's hard; and thou would hev found it partic'larly hard if ta had gone after a fine lady to do it for thee."

At length the wonderful day—Ben's wedding-day—arrived. The ceremony was to be performed on Sunday morning, and Ben was to wait in the chapel the arrival of his bride. He managed somehow to get through his Sunday-school duties; and he listened with a kind of far-away sense to the preliminary services. Then, just before the sermon, the bride, attended by Sarah Benson and a little crowd of her acquaintances, entered. She had on a white muslin gown, and a little bonnet covered with orange-blossoms, and a white tulle veil; and Ben had never been before, and never would be again, at once so proud and so ashamed as when he joined her at the communion rails.

Some days before the marriage Nelly had shown him her white dress, and he had thought it very simple and suitable; but the tulle veil and the orange-blossoms took him quite by surprise. He told himself that as soon as he got Nelly home he would say a few words to her about them; but somehow he could not say them, and, having let this opportunity pass for asserting his own views and opinions, he never since has had another. In fact, very shortly after his marriage he began to see the superiority of Nelly's opinions, until he eventually came to consider her the one perfect piece of feminine workmanship that the Creator had achieved.

Sarah had taken the greatest pleasure in Ben and Nelly's wedding, and it was to her deft fingers Nelly owed the beauty and fitness of her marriage garments; for she thoroughly approved Ben's choice, knowing that there were far more chances

for his happiness with a little lass so young and simple that submission to her pleasure was no more humiliating than submission to the whims of a child, than there would have been had he united himself to some discreet, experienced woman, whom he must have met on equal grounds, and whose opposition to his will would have been a serious offence.

At this time Sarah was very happy. True, she heard next to nothing of Jonathan, for as everything is known in a mill village, it had been thought best to deny themselves the pleasure of a correspondence, from which many unjust and unkind suspicions might arise. But she trusted entirely in her lover; and Jonathan's heart was firmly placed on her. Also, the letters which came from Steve were more and more encouraging; and the promises they contained had received frequent emphatic redemptions in cash—a very literal and unromantic, but yet a very certain and satisfactory evidence of his well-doing.

One night in the beginning of December Sarah was coming from the mill. It was a clear, frosty night, and she saw the bright blaze of the cottage fire glinting cheerfully through the darkness. She was thinking of Steve—thinking of him tossing on the stormy Atlantic, and yet thinking of him with a glad and grateful heart. Last year at that very time they had been in such poverty and anxiety. Steve's life then seemed to be altogether waste material. He had almost slipped beyond even her ever-green hope. Oh, how good God had been to him! When every one else's love and patience had been worn out, God's was still fresh. "*His loving-kindness faileth not*"—the words were on her lips when the village postman touched her.

"Here's a letter for thy folks, Sarah—an American letter. Happen there'll be good news in it."

"Happen there will, Joe. Good news comes to them as look and hope for it; and our Joyce says she has hed a feeling like it." She took the letter and hurried home, and gave it into Joyce's hand with a kiss. In a few moments she heard Joyce calling her in an excited manner, and she hurried downstairs.

"Look thee here, Sarah. I hev gotten a post-office order for £20 ! For £20, Sarah ! Did ta iver hear of t' like ? But that's nowt to t' rest. Steve will be in Liverpool about the 20th of this month, and he says we are all to be there—me and t' childer—and he hes a home in New York ready for us, and we are going, Sarah. Oh, my ! Going away from all t' bad memories of cold and hunger and sorrow ! And he's quartermaster of t' *Arion*, Sarah ! Oh, my ! oh, my ! I niver, niver hoped for such a joy as this ! Oh, my ! oh, my !" and Joyce walked rapidly about the kitchen, with Steve's letter in one hand and the money-order in the other, far too much excited to talk sensibly for some time about the good news that had come to her.

Sarah kissed her heartily again. "Try and settle thysen a bit, Joyce," she pleaded ; "there's a deal for thee to look after. Warm, decent clothing to get, and t' furniture to sell, and many a thing that thou won't want to sell to be packed up. Thou will hev to be busy night and day, I'll warrant."

"And thou will hev to stop from t' mill and help me, for I'm that flustered I don't know what I am doing. I'll hev to rely on thee, Sarah ; but it is t' last time, lass—it is t' last time!"

Very soon the news spread through the village, and it lost nothing in the spreading. Steve was now as much praised as a year ago he had been condemned. His old mates found out that they had always thought well of Steve, and remembered, as most of them could do, small acts of kindness he had done them. They called upon Joyce with congratulations, and sent many a pleasant message to her husband, so that Joyce's last days in her native village were the proudest and happiest days of her life.

On the 19th she left for Liverpool, and Sarah went with her, for there were half a dozen boxes as well as the children to care for, and Joyce had, in an excessive degree, the restless, fearful, fussy temper which makes travelling a terror to such women. However, in spite of Joyce's convictions that every one wanted

to steal her boxes, and that they were certainly on the wrong road, Liverpool was safely reached. The *Arion* was in port, and though Steve was very busy, the captain managed to spare him long enough to bring his family on board. It was a joyful meeting, and Sarah was amazed to see her brother. The free, open-air life had developed him physically, as well as mentally and morally. He was brown and merry and strong, and full of fun.

"Oh, my dear, dear lad," she cried, "but I am glad to see thee! Why, thou isn't t' same Steve at all!"

"Mebbe I'm not, Sarah; but I am t' right Steve now. I am t' Steve that God and Nature meant me to be. Why, Joyce and Sarah, lasses, I am t' quartermaster already; and some day I'll sail my own ship to every port I hev read and dreamed about. See if I don't!"

Sarah fully believed him. She was standing by his side on the deck of the *Arion*, and thinking how handsome he looked in his blue sailor dress, and how bright and purpose-like were all his ways. Half an hour afterwards she bid him "Farewell!" but it was a farewell full of hope and satisfaction. She had a positive conviction of his future success, and when she turned away from the dock, she saw through happy tears the quartermaster of the *Arion* holding the baby shoulder-high for her last look, and Joyce and Charlotta Victoria and little Billy standing beside him.

And ere we bid farewell to Steve, we must say this thing of him—he has amply redeemed all his promises; and there is not to-day in all the merchant-service a safer, bolder, or more trusted captain than Stephen Benson. Also, so many of his own dreams have been realized. He has sailed his ship to Indian seas and Mediterranean cities, and to tropical South American harbors; and found time, without neglecting his legitimate business, to make a good many interesting observations on animal and vegetable life, and to collect all kinds of beautiful and singular specimens in his pretty home on the New Jersey coast.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONLY ONE LOVE.

“Her tremulous smiles ; her glances’ sweet recall
Of love.

* * * * *

What sweeter than these things, except the thing
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet—
The confident heart’s still fervor.”

It was the day before Christmas, and the mills had been dismissed and closed at noon ; but Ben Holden and Jonas Shuttleworth still lingered in the office, going over some papers that the elder man wished to have in complete order before the beginning of the year. Ben was an industrious, strict business man, but Shuttleworth’s energy and precision almost wearied him.

“Dost ta niver get tired ?” he asked, looking with a kind of wonder at the bright eyes and restless hands of his companion.

“I’m niver tired as long as I’m busy, Ben. After I gave up business, ten years ago, I used to be weary to death varry often ; but since I hev been the ‘Co.’ of Burley’s Mills I hevn’t hed a tiresome minute.”

“How’s that ?”

“Why, ta sees, if a man hes no brains but business brains he’s lonesome without business—just as lonesome as a gambler without his cards. Surely to goodness thou isn’t tired ?”

“Not I. But at Christmas-time, when a man hes a home and a wife—”

“Oh, I see ! It’s thy wife that is pulling thee from t’ mill. I didn’t think thou would iver hev been such a fool about a woman.”

"She is nobbut a child yet, ta sees."

"Child or not, she is thy master."

Ben laughed, and just then there was a ring at the outer gate.

"That is Jonathan's ring," he said. "I'd know it in a thousand. He always pulls t' bell as if ivery one was dead asleep but himsen." But as he was speaking, Ben was hastening to the gate, and in a few minutes the two men came back together holding each other by the hand, and laughing heartily. Jonas Shuttleworth heard them, and he pushed the papers into a drawer and locked them up carefully. Then he turned to meet his nephew, and though his manner was less effusive than Ben's, its genuine kindness was just as unmistakable.

"My word," he said, "but thou art improved!" and as Jonathan came into the brighter light the improvement was very evident. Travel and rest had done wonders for him; he looked indeed many years younger than he did when he left home.

"And how is t' squire and his wife, my grandniece?" asked Shuttleworth.

"He is very near well, and he will return home as soon as t' cold weather is over. Eleanor and Aske! why, they are t' happiest couple I iver saw now. Ben," and he turned towards his friend, "Eleanor is mistress and master both; and as for Aske, either he doesn't know it, or else he likes it so well that he'd rather say nothing against it."

"It's varry like he knows it, Jonathan, and that he enjoys it; and I wouldn't wonder but what he's a deal better and happier man as things are now."

Jonathan looked at Ben and laughed.

"Why, Ben, thou hes changed thy views a bit. Now then, uncle, how is all with thee?"

"All is much better than might be, nephew; and as for t' mill, it is coming on finely. Thy 'Co.' hesn't been a bad partner, and thou will see that."

"I niver expected he would be. And what hes thou been doing, Ben?"

"I hev been getting married."

“What?”

“I hev been getting married.”

“Get out wi’ thee!”

“I say I hev been getting married.”

“I say thou art joking.”

“Nay, I’m none good at that business. I got me a wife varry soon after thou sold t’ house to me.”

“Niver?”

“Ay, I did that.”

“Well, well, well, it beats all. Thee married?”

“For sure, why not? I didn’t want to spoil on thy hands. Thou seemed afraid of it.”

“But in such a hurry?”

“Ay, I know my own mind pretty well. It doesn’t take me five or six years to do my courting. Happen I hev a more persuading way wi’ me than thou hes.”

“I can’t get oover it. Thee married? Who iver did ta sort with? Ann Gibson?”

“Ann Gibson!” answered Ben, sarcastically. “I like t’ best and bonniest o’ iverything. If ta is thinking of besting me in a wife thou will hev to ride t’ length and t’ breadth of England to find one half so bonny, that’s all.”

“Thou art nobbut fooling me, Ben.”

“Am I, though? Come home with me and hev a cup o’ tea. I’m sure thou needs it, and Mr. Shuttleworth will come, too, I’se warrant.”

“Ay, I think we can’t do a better thing, Jorrathan. I go varry often wi’ Ben; his missis makes a good cup, and it will do thee good, right off t’ railway.”

And as Jonathan wanted to see Sarah that night he thought it would be a very good thing to do. He could have his tea, wash his face and hands, and Sarah’s house was not a quarter of an hour’s walk from Ben’s house. So the mill was locked, and the three men went leisurely up the road to Ben’s home, Shuttleworth walking between Jonathan and Ben, and leaning upon them.

"What will thy missis say, Ben, at us coming without notice? Women don't like such ways."

"My missis isn't like t' main of women in a deal of things. See how bright t' house looks, Jonathan! It is thy friend's house now."

"Ay, and it used to be—Sykes's. I don't forget, Ben."

"I didn't think thou did. But it's good to remind one's self. Blessings are easy things to forget."

Ben's house did indeed look bright. In honor of Christmas there were wreaths of evergreens in all the windows, and lights behind them; and in the down-stairs rooms the pleasant, ruddy glow of fires; and when the servant opened the door there was a feeling of warmth and brightness, and a smell of delicacies in preparation that was positively exhilarating. And the parlor looked so cosey that Ben was quite proud of it; and he touched Nelly's rocking-chair in such a tender way that Jonathan could not but notice how pretty and homelike it looked, with her sewing laid across it, and her thimble and scissors, and spool of white thread.

In a few minutes there was a light footstep, and Nelly came in, rosy with the heat of the kitchen, and with a little white apron on to shield her pretty brown merino dress. She put both her hands in Jonas Shuttleworth's, dropped a courtesy to Jonathan, and then went right to Ben, and he took her proudly to his heart and kissed her.

"Let's hev a cup o' tea, missis," he said, fondly; and she laughed, and answered, "Why, here it comes, Ben; and lots of spice-bread and Yorkshire pie"—and Jonathan could not but wonder at the dainty little woman, and look at Ben in such an astonished way that Ben, catching such a look, burst out laughing at it. And with this and that they had the merriest kind of meal—old Jonas Shuttleworth seeming to enjoy it better than any one.

Afterwards Jonathan went up-stairs to bathe his face and hands, and Ben followed him. "Thou art going to see Sarah Benson, I'll warrant?"

"Thou hes hit t' truth, Ben. I shall not be happy till I hev seen her; so there's no use in going home till I'm satisfied."

"Well, Jonathan, I advise thee to get married as fast as iver ta can. I wonder thou hes hed so little human nature in thee as to put it off so long. A man doesn't know what happiness is till he gets a wife. I don't expect thou can iver be as happy as Nelly and me is; but if ta comes half-way near it thou will do middling well."

"Will ta be quiet? My word! but it takes a young cock to crow hard! What does thou know about heving a wife? Thy honey-moon isn't oover yet."

"It niver will be, Jonathan. Now what does ta think of my missis?"

"Why-a! I *was* astonished, I was that! She is a varry bonny little lass."

"And as obedient and innocent and loving as a child."

"I thought t' obedience was mainly on thy side. She seemed to me to give all t' orders; and it appeared like as if it was thy place to obey them."

"Bless thee! she knows no better. She doesn't think they are orders—not she."

"Hes ta seen Sarah lately?"

"I saw her to-day. She was going to t' chapel to dress it up a bit. It was always Sarah's work, and there's few could do it like her."

"Was she looking well?"

"Uncommon well. Now, I'll tell thee some rare good news. Joyce and all t' childer have gone to America."

"Now then! Art ta sure?"

"Quite sure. Steve sent them twenty pounds—they hed it up to a hundred pounds in t' village—and Joyce sold t' furniture; and Sarah told me that Steve hed a comfortable home for them in New York."

"How did they go?"

"Why, in t' same vessel Steve sailed in. Sarah went to Liv-

erpool with them ; if she hedn't, I don't think they'd iver hev got there. She had iverything to do at t' last, but she was thet happy she niver got tired ; although Joyce would tire an angel out o' heaven with her whimwhams and flurries and worritin' ways."

" Well, this is good news, Ben ! I'm glad it came to me from thy lips, old friend. And I'm right glad thou art so happy thysen. Now I'm going to see Sarah, and if t' carriage comes, don't let Uncle Shuttleworth wait for me. I'll happen to be a bit late."

" Ay, I think it's likely. Will ta stay here all night?"

" Nay, I won't ; I'll walk home. When I hev hed a talk wi' Sarah I won't mind t' walk one bit. Is she at t' old cottage yet?"

" Ay, she is. She told me she would bide until t' new-year."

In fact, Sarah had gone back to her old home at the beginning of Joyce's troubles ; and after bidding Steve and his family "good-by" in Liverpool, she returned to the room she had occupied in it. For the cottage had a certain place in her heart ; her earliest and tenderest memories were linked with its small rooms, and she wished to leave them as spotless as lime and soap and labor could make them.

Two days she spent in this work, but the day before Christmas she had given for many a year to decorating the chapel for the festival. Last Christmas she had been in too great poverty and anxiety to undertake it, and therefore she was the more eager to make up this year what had been lacking of her service. So from morning to night she was busy in the chapel, and she was just arranging the last cluster of berries when she heard some one call her.

" Sarah !"

The voice was a strong, cheery one, and her soul knew its faintest echo. She made no pretence of not hearing it, of not knowing it, but answered at once, " I am here, master."

She was standing by the communion rail when he joined

her, and he said, "Thou art just where I want thee to be, my dear, dear lass. Sarah, I hev t' license in my pocket, and t' marriage-ring, too, and I saw t' preacher as I came here, and he says he'll wed us to-morrow morning. Will ta come home to-morrow?"

"My dear lad, now I'll do whatever thou wants me to do. I hev no duty to put before my love for thee now."

Then they sat down together in Jonathan's pew—at last, at last, each heart able to give perfect love and perfect confidence to the other.

"And thou art all mine now, Sarah?"

"I am all thine, Jonathan. My heart hes ached for many a year between Steve and thee; but I hev done my last duty to Steve. He needs me no more, thank God! and now I can heartily come to thee. There is no other love between me and thee now."

And Jonathan said, "Thank God!" But his voice was very low, and he could hardly speak for emotion, and for a few moments both were silent for very happiness.

Then Sarah told all about Steve; and Jonathan spoke of the last Christmas-eve, and of what peace and prosperity had followed the good deed done on it. And they sat so long that the chapel-keeper looked in disapprovingly several times, but at last went home happy with a sovereign in his pocket, and so much gratitude to Jonathan in his heart that he fully resolved not to tell his wife what he suspected—a resolution that, it is needless to say, he broke within an hour.

The next morning there was the usual Christmas service in the chapel; and, after it, Jonathan and his uncle, Jonas Shuttleworth, Ben Holden and his wife, and the preacher's wife and Sarah Benson, came quietly up to the communion rails. The movement was absolutely unexpected; but there was a profound interest and curiosity, and no one in the congregation moved until Jonathan, radiant with joy, turned to them with his wife upon his arm.

Then they crowded round him with their good wishes and their congratulations; and so, amid the smiles and blessings of all who knew them, he put Sarah into his carriage and drove her away to his home, the happiest man in England that Christmas-day.

THE END.

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